



The Postcolonial World

Edited by
Jyotsna G. Singh and David D. Kim

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THE POSTCOLONIAL WORLD



The Postcolonial World presents an overview of the field and extends critical debate in exciting new directions. It provides an important and timely reappraisal of postcolonialism as an aesthetic, political, and historical movement, and of postcolonial studies as a multidisciplinary, transcultural field. Essays map the terrain of the postcolonial as a global phenomenon at the intersection of several disciplinary inquiries. Framed by an introductory chapter and a concluding essay, the eight sections examine:

- Affective, Postcolonial Histories
- Postcolonial Desires
- Religious Imaginings
- Postcolonial Geographies and Spatial Practices
- Human Rights and Postcolonial Conflicts
- Postcolonial Cultures and Digital Humanities
- Ecocritical Inquiries in Postcolonial Studies
- Postcolonialism versus Neoliberalism

The Postcolonial World looks afresh at re-emerging conditions of postcoloniality in the twenty-first century and draws on a wide range of representational strategies, cultural practices, material forms, and affective affiliations. The volume is an essential reading for scholars and students of postcolonialism.

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INTRODUCTION

THE POSTCOLONIAL WORLD

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Jyotsna G. Singh

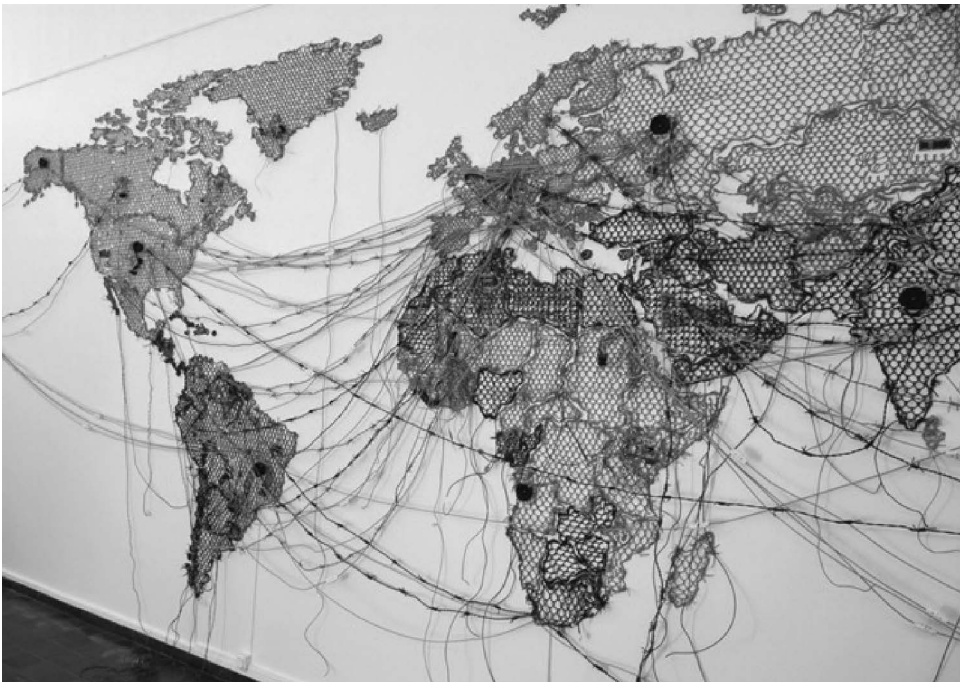


Figure I.1 Installation and Text: Reena Saini Kallat,
Untitled (Map/Drawing) 2011.

Source: Göteborg International Biennale for Contemporary Art, 2011
curator, Sarat Maharaj, Göteborgs Konsthall, Sweden.

The flows and movements of travelers, migrants, labor across the world have produced major social and economic implications as well as new forms of cultural exchange. It has not only allowed us to free cultural identities from a physical place but see us all as entwined in a symbolic web as it were. The work was conceived with

electric wires to form a drawing that will trace migration patterns globally where multitudes of actors interact without knowledge of the overall situation.

While technology and commerce are blurring geographic boundaries, there are inherent contradictions that the electric wires here seem to suggest both as conduit and barrier, serving on the one hand as channels of transmission and yet on the other their linear formations evoke barbed wires or different kinds of fencing. By changing the instrument of this quasi-cartographic drawing from a pencil line to a wire, I'm interested in the notion of the map as dynamic, ever changing, streaming and transferring data with the global flows of energies and people, as the courses of these travelers intersect.

– Reena Saini Kallat[†]

I. MAPPING THE POSTCOLONIAL

How do we map the postcolonial world within the transnational, globalizing history of late capitalism? The above epigraph/text accompanying the image of the electrically wired world map on the cover of this book, by artist Reena Saini Kallat (reproduced in Figure 1.1 from a different angle) invokes the complexities of this historical moment: of the global flux of “travelers, migrants, labor across the world . . . a multitude of actors [interacting] without knowledge of the overall situation” (epigraph). Yet this global flow of energies is far from smooth and unproblematic:

there are inherent contradictions that the electric wires here seem to suggest both as conduit and barrier, serving on the one hand as channels of transmission and yet on the other their linear formations evoke barbed wires or different kinds of fencing.

Here the “barbed” electric wires are also a reminder of earlier political conflicts and traumas of fascism, colonization, and decolonization, among others. And imbricated within these global networks, I believe, is the *specter* of the postcolonial world born in the aftermath of Western colonialism and imperialism, yet demonstrating a continuing relevance, even *urgency*, within global modernity's neoliberal agendas. One distinctive aspect of these agendas is that they often elide or obfuscate earlier political, socio-economic, and cultural struggles between East and West or between North and South. Whether in the contemporary flows of African and Middle Eastern migrants risking danger and death to enter Europe, in the fault-lines of political, religious, and cultural tensions between Europeans and the descendants of their formerly colonized peoples – especially Muslims – or within new imperatives of neoliberal capitalism shaping the Global South, we are often reminded of some “unfinished business” of colonial and postcolonial historical divisions, repeating themselves in new permutations and agendas. As Paul Gilroy succinctly sums up in his book, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, the “imperial and colonial past continues to shape political life in the overdeveloped-but-no-longer-imperial countries.”²

Some critics, not surprisingly, may dismiss postcolonialism (including postcolonial studies) as a historical paradigm that is somewhat passé, marking the “end of history,” and arguing that we no longer live in an age of empires and nor can we bask in the celebratory, grand narratives of decolonization.³ Recently, however, we have been

witness to an abrupt and revisionary shift in the periodization of postcolonial history, one that occurred after 9/11, producing the apocalyptic lexicon: “ground zero,” “year zero,” as postcolonial critic Neil Lazarus observes:

The corollary of this widespread belief that “9/11” marked the end of the world as we used to know it is that the ghastly and colossal (not to say terroristic) violence subsequently visited on Afghanistan and Iraq, and also the wholesale destruction of civil liberties on the “home” fronts . . . must be construed as responses . . . to these cataclysmic world-changing events.⁴

These new conditions of the postcolonial are the reasons why Derek Gregory refers to the post-9/11 era as “the colonial present.”⁵ In these changing and complex configurations of renewed East–West violence, I would like to remind our readers that postcolonialism continues to remain viable as an ongoing, historical category, with new global mutations notwithstanding, as well as a crucial source of critical and theoretical vocabularies, enabling scholars and students in many disciplines worldwide to work through the past in the present and vice versa. Let me begin with a brief overview of the historical contexts within which postcolonialism evolved, both as a historical category and a source of distinctive theoretical concepts, vocabularies, and practices. (My purpose here is to provide the background for later mutations of postcoloniality covered by this collection; thus, I only represent this history in *broad strokes*, while highlighting the discourses of decolonization and postcolonialism as developed in the work of key representative figures.)

The postcolonial world had two moments of genesis in modern history. While Latin American nations had undergone independence in the first half of the nineteenth century, the postcolonial world in other regions of the world emerged from anticolonial struggles after the two World Wars. Comprising new nation-states across Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, this long road to decolonization and postcolonial realignments ushered in a second wave of nationalist aspirations, while reifying the nineteenth-century European construct of “the nation” around the globe. As new nations came into being, so did a realignment of borders, some after fraught moments of partition, such as in the Indian subcontinent, and others simply in re-inscriptions of arbitrary colonial divisions – in new maps – as extensions of neocolonial rule. Critical of these unfinished decolonizing projects, the postcolonial world began to redefine cultural, political, geographical, and economic demarcations in a way that seemed to darken the past splendor of Europe. In the process, though, as the nations emerging from decolonization attempted to produce coherent narratives of nationalism and national identity, typically in resistance to empire, the project of the “nation” in modernity was often quite ambivalent, fraught, and constantly being re-negotiated.⁶ This perspective was underpinned by a conceptualization of the nation as a “symbolic structure” working like the plot of a realist novel – a concept that further linked the ramifications of nation formation to the fields of literary and cultural studies within postcolonial scholarship.⁷

As the postcolonial world was taking shape “on the ground,” so to speak, postcolonial *studies* began to emerge in the late 1970s via the earlier liberationist legacies of Aime Cesaire, Leopold Senghor, Leon Damas, Frantz Fanon, C.L.R. James, and others. One unifying source in this decolonizing tide emerged as the *Negritude* movement

in Africa and the Caribbean; this became the inspiration for broad anticolonial struggles whose aims were not only to gain political freedom, but also to re-imagine the world in ways that would “decolonize the mind.”⁸ Aime Césaire’s vision, for instance, was poetic as much as political; in his works ranging from his rich polemic, *Discourse on Colonialism*, his poetic exploration, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, and his radical play, *Une Tempête* (a revision of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*), among others, he demonstrated his belief in the “revolutionary nature of poetry” and in “poetry as a powerful source of knowledge and revolt.” Or, put another way, he demonstrated that poetry is “the only way to achieve the kind of knowledge we need to move beyond the world’s crises.”⁹ Thus, not only is the *Notebook* an extended, surrealist poetic meditation on his identity as a black man within European colonial rule, but the *Discourse* can also be considered a historical prose poem against the realities of colonialism and the discourse of Western civilization.¹⁰ My point here is to show how a poetic idiom was crucial for him to articulate his revolutionary agenda – and to imagine a postcolonial world.

Frantz Fanon, who had been Césaire’s student, also produced definitive works in which he took on the struggles and mapped the consciousness of the colonized “natives” as they rose up to reclaim their lands and their human dignity. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon astutely observes the psychological dimensions of the phenomenological violence experienced by blacks under European rule; in *The Wretched of the Earth*, he presents the political possibilities of resistance through a more abstract analysis of colonialism and violence, which has sometimes been described as the handbook for a Black revolution.¹¹ The centrality of language – the colonial signifying system – in both the phenomenological violence and resistance to it that underpins his writings also points to strategies of “decolonizing the mind” that were key to the Negritude and Pan-African movements to which he was introduced by Césaire.¹² In sum, these early liberationist movements led the way in *imaginatively* evoking new political, social, and psychic possibilities beyond colonization. Through many strands of this process, these works were able to harness the forces of resistance and decolonization, while engaging with issues of nationalism, national identity, and social justice. Thus, in this project, the *literature* that emerged during this period, continuing through the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, gave us complex perspectives on nation-formation often drawing on intertwining themes of decolonization and anti-colonialism, which proved crucial in producing additional rhetorical and linguistic re-imaginings of the postcolonial world from a variety of perspectives. In different parts of Africa, authors such Chinua Achebe and, later, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, Kateb Yacine, and Ousmane Sembene (also a filmmaker), and in the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, creative writers like Mahmoud Darwish, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Amrita Pritam, Sa’adat Hasan “Manto,” and Qurratulain Hyder were just a few among the numerous literary figures whose works responded with depth and complexity to these shifting political, cultural, and national realignments.¹³ Richly informing these creative imaginings were questions of subjectivity, community, and national identity with which these authors struggled, revealing ambiguities and complexities in their responses to the “nation” – both real and imagined.

While these literary works from the 1950s onwards created a fertile ground on which new national and cultural communities could be imagined, and often in ways

that disrupted Western self-representations, the *disciplinary formation* of post-colonial studies – as a field that used historical hindsight to theoretically interrogate Eurocentric modes of thought – only took off (in the West) in the late 1970s with the publication of Said’s seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) and, later, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), to which we wish to pay a special *tribute* in this volume. His seminal argument in this text countered the “literary-cultural establishment as a whole,” which had “declared the serious study of imperialism and culture off limits.”¹⁴ Instead, Said drew attention to a new discourse, Orientalism, which he defined as “a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts.”¹⁵ In the course of fifteen years, these two seminal texts offered scholars in history, literature, film, music, art, art history, religion, philosophy, anthropology, and sociology, among other fields, rich theoretical moorings to postcolonialism as an essential perspective on politics, history, culture, and society. In terms of its methodology, postcolonial theory and critical practice, following Said and others, was launched “on the unmasking, the making and operation of colonial discourses – an undertaking which . . . shared a concern with the specific historical conditions and social purposes of ideological representation.”¹⁶ Colonial discourse analysis clearly showed the links between the rhetorical power of language and its imbrications within power, knowledge, society, and history. Thus, even as it evolved, postcolonial discourse clearly staked its scholarly and political claims by challenging the European storyline about its colonial empires, often while interrogating the Western discourses (and their teleology) of progress and civilization. To elaborate further on the fissures in this post-imperial, global dynamics, Said in *Culture and Imperialism* gestured to the possibility of new “contrapuntal” readings, which revealed the “overlapping territories” and “intertwined histories” of colonial encounters, along with rigorous critiques of “the fundamentally static notion of identity.”¹⁷

Said’s *Orientalism* particularly, and the prolific corpus of work that followed, has generated both a discussion and a critique of his formulations. Often, the criticism is reflected through a particular theoretical and ideological lens, as is evident in a notable example of an extended analysis by Aijaz Ahmad: “Argued from a Marxist perspective,” and offering a “critique of Said on fundamental issues of theory and history,” Ahmad states that “Edward Said’s attempt to assemble a narrative of European humanism’s complicity in the history of European colonialism lapses into ambivalences.”¹⁸ He mentions several areas of contradictions and blurred analyses in *Orientalism*, such as the irreconcilable gap between Said’s deployments of Foucault, who would have no brook with humanism, while using procedures taken “directly from the high humanist tradition of comparative literature and philology,” among others.¹⁹ But while Ahmad’s essay seems reasoned in pointing out some inconsistencies in Said’s arguments and methodology, he nonetheless shows a curious *resistance* to a full understanding of *why* or *how* this work occasioned a paradigm shift within the Anglo-American scholarly world, and later worldwide. For instance, while *Orientalism* has perhaps been the subject of praise and criticism in equal measure, it has been translated into thirty-six languages. And Ahmad’s ploy to make assumptions about imaginary, resistant readers or addressees of the text seems forced and selective: for persons with backgrounds from philology and comparative literature “this was familiar territory,” he states, “but those were precisely the persons who were most likely to resist the invitation to read this body of writing *not* as literature, but as documents

of an entirely different sort of archive, namely, the *Orientalist* archive.”²⁰ The other reader he describes, namely the Orientalist, “into whose archive those other kinds of texts were being read, was equally displeased and bewildered, because he was being attacked. . . .”²¹ As for those who bestowed upon this book the status of a “classic,” Ahmad points out that they were the “metropolitan intelligentsia” which included “Asian immigrants who were interested in narratives of oppression” that did not include a Marxist analysis of class.²² Thus, he seems to neatly, and somewhat arbitrarily, ascribe responses and motivations to distinct readers, without allowing for subjective and more complex intellectual engagements, which, I believe, blindsides him to the *extent* to which *Orientalism* challenged disciplinary boundaries in the Anglo-American academy and culture in the 1970s and ’80s. In the fields of literary and cultural studies, for instance, Said’s ideas resonated in English departments invested in the idea of coherent “national” literatures and cultures, where Western canons of literature, art, and culture were routinely deployed to represent the so-called universal values of civilization. Thus, they were walled off from any engagements with history and ideology – especially, as Said pointed out, from the narratives of Western colonialism. Overall, however, what Ahmad states in passing acknowledgement is quite revelatory: “part of the pleasure of the book, which caused anxiety in some circles, excitement in others, was its transgressions of academic boundaries.”²³ It is precisely this boundary-crossing feature – perhaps only at an exploratory, pioneering stage here – that explains not only why *Orientalism* was a success, but *why and how* postcolonial studies as a field has increasingly focused on crossing disciplinary boundaries in fruitful ways – a cross-disciplinarity that *The Postcolonial World* explores and productively expands in this collection of essays.²⁴

Within the first wave of postcolonial critics following/overlapping with Edward Said, interdisciplinary trends, inflected with concerns about representational practices within colonial/postcolonial contexts, continued apace. Homi Bhabha was one of several renowned figures who offered another take on contrapuntality by coining the tropes of “hybridity,” “interstitiality,” and “mimicry.” With these iconic terms, he destabilized Manichean conceptions of self and other in the age of empires and thereafter. As he argued, there could not be a Europe without its hybrid, mimicking others in the non-West.²⁵ Another icon of the first wave, Gayatri Spivak, gave us the central, provocative question of the postcolonial condition: “Can the Subaltern speak”?²⁶ Coalescing into this question were theoretical reflections on subject-formation within the problematics of representing “others” from marginalized groups, resonating particularly for feminism and its subjects. To understand the political and intellectual genesis and implications of this essay, let us turn to Partha Chatterjee’s explanation:

I now think Spivak’s essay came to us as the postcolonial moment in Subaltern Studies. More than the question of how the third world subject is represented within Western discourse, or the arguments about strategic essentialism . . . it is the difficult and laborious shift to a consciously poststructuralist method that was facilitated by Spivak’s intervention.²⁷

However, as he explains further, this could *not* have happened from the late 1980s onwards so rapidly without other political changes:

What changed before our eyes was the rapid incorporation of subaltern populations into the web of governmentality . . . [and] it was not possible for the subalternist/postcolonial scholar to insist any more that the postcolonial nation state was something “essentially” external to the subaltern consciousness.²⁸

Finally, to sum up this overview, Cesaire, Fanon, Said, Spivak, and Bhabha may seem like a sketchy list to track the genesis of the expansive network of the postcolonial movement; but from another perspective, as signifiers, their names themselves are *constitutive* of any discourse of colonialism/postcolonialism as it has shaped the historical evolution of this field – and continues to do so today.

II. DEFINING THE POSTCOLONIAL

My brief overview of the development of postcolonial studies as a theoretical and cultural formation is to remind readers that if it seems that the terms of postcolonial theory articulated by these first-wave theorists seem “everywhere,” and ubiquitous as common knowledge today, it is precisely because their emergence inaugurated and facilitated a seismic shift in the humanities and social sciences – a shift that was often described as a “crisis of representation” in the Anglo-American world, with broad ramifications worldwide.²⁹ Second, my aim is not to simply endorse an “approved” reading of the key texts. Rather, it is also to signal to readers that the works of all these figures – as well as of subsequent theorists – have been and continue to be open to constant methodological critique. Thus, in proliferating, multi-faceted, and often angst-ridden debates, postcolonial scholars continue to rigorously expose and discuss the lacunae in their own field. One overarching concern points to the gap between theory and practice, as Graham Huggan aptly states in his essay on “Postcolonialism and Its Discontents”: “The increasingly self-reflexive abstractions of postcolonial theory – aware though their practitioners are of the discrepancy between cerebral cultural critique and a viable agenda for social change – run the risk of providing a mask for continued cultural ignorance.”³⁰ Critics also question assumptions of a homogenous postcolonialism that may not always be inclusive in scope and intent, as is evident in the debates in settler colonies such as Canada and Australia, which have recently put pressure on the term postcolonialism when considering the “impact and implication of their respective Native cultures. . . . [Thus, in Australia for instance,] Aboriginals are . . . co-opted into a discourse of liberation controlled by those who still oppress them.”³¹ Finally, it is quite remarkable how such critiques about gaps or misalignments in theory and practice in postcolonial studies have grown exponentially in the past two decades, especially from the criteria of different subfields and via different disciplinary/conceptual perspectives: trauma theory, queer theory, and materialist/Marxist analysis (such as Aijaz Ahmad’s), among several others.³²

Cognizant of this prolific critical activity, the individual essays in this volume engage with the work of postcolonial theorists on varying levels. Overall, however, in *The Postcolonial World* we do *not* take up any single strand of the self-reflexive critique mentioned above, nor do we deploy any *one* overarching theoretical framework premised on a homogenous view of postcolonialism. We begin with the general claim that a postcolonial lens has become indispensable in viewing and reassessing configurations of power, hierarchy, and difference in the humanities and the social

sciences, covering areas that include the Global South, the former settler colonies, and the metropolitan centers. We draw on a variety of topics that necessitate an expansive methodology, covering different representational strategies, cultural practices, material forms, and affective affiliations. Moving across conventional disciplinary boundaries, we hope to facilitate a “conversation” between literature, theory, culture, and the social sciences – as well as to show interconnections between textual, visual, digital, and kinetic representational forms and practices. Thus, following this objective, the areas of study in *The Postcolonial World* include historical trauma, sexualities, religious imaginings, space/geography, ecology, digitization, human rights, and neoliberalism, enabling in the process uncanny crossings of cultural, national, and methodological boundaries.³³

In our global era, it may seem to some that “postcolonial work looks backward to critique colonial systems that are no longer relevant.”³⁴ However, in *The Postcolonial World* our premise (following Diana Brydon) is that “[postcolonial work] looks backward to understand *how we live now*” (my italics). And in this vein, she aptly defines the relevance of postcolonial work as having “a decolonizing agenda . . . to *imagine* better ways of living together.”³⁵ It would not be difficult to identify influences of colonial histories that have survived today in institutions, politics, architecture, and social biases, but they have to be recognized and interrogated as *such*. Such decolonizing impulses are often evident in new anti-Western, anti-imperial gestures, reminiscent yet distinct versions of earlier political struggles, while giving a fresh impetus to contemporary cosmopolitical, multilingual, and transnational manifestations of power.³⁶ *Imagination*, I believe, is the key element in harnessing postcolonial concepts and values to decolonizing practices that lead to social justice via a strong inclusionary agenda. In this endeavor, a postcolonial approach is well served in harnessing a “poetic imagination” which, as Jahan Ramazani reminds us, should aim to be “transnational, [and] a nation-crossing force that exceeds the limits of the territorial and juridical norm.”³⁷ Thus, it is for us as postcolonial scholars to *imagine* and raise questions about such possibilities: How can the postcolonial archive deploy its wealth of affective stories about past and ongoing injustices to understand the contributions of memory-making in shaping a just world? What can postcolonial work offer to the projects in human rights for all? How can we rewrite and re-imagine a postcolonial revolution for the “wretched” of the earth by ecological preservation? How do we “queer” gender and race hierarchies and re-figure Orientalized sexualities and ethnicities inherited from colonialism? Is there a way to re-figure revolution via “postcolonial happiness”? Can the digital humanities offer postcolonial studies new models for negotiating the relationship between praxis and theory? And in turn, how can postcolonial theory bring to the digital humanities a concern about inclusive representation within knowledge production? These are some of the questions addressed by the essays in *The Postcolonial World* and we also hope that as readers, you will discover varied possibilities – as well as address *other* questions – for re-imagining the postcolonial world as you read the following chapters.

To sum up, our project in this volume is to map the postcolonial world as inflected in the contemporary global imaginary, though always keeping in mind the continuing affects/effects or “specters” of colonial and postcolonial history. In our highly mediated global atmosphere, postcolonial “imagined communities” are no longer strictly national (as in Anderson’s formulation during the decolonization phase), but consist

of affective, transnational, transcultural, diasporic, and digital interconnections that put to test both local affiliations and hegemonic powers. In an organization of *eight sections, twenty-nine chapters* of newly commissioned essays, and a concluding editorial essay – entitled, “What Is the Postcolonial World? Assembling, Networking, Traveling” – we re-engage with the familiar, yet continuously transforming, postcolonial imaginaries – its landscapes, voices, traumas, desires, beliefs, to name a few. Thus, we are keenly cognizant of the reemerging conditions of postcoloniality in its varied global and transnational dimensions: in the way in which it casts a shadow on the confidence of neoliberalism; in the current struggles for human rights in proliferating contexts; in the “queering” of postcolonial identities; in the re-imaginings of the religion–secularism binary; in the reconfigurations of spatial practices; and in digital world-making, among others. Overall, while all the essays to some extent draw from earlier postcolonial theoretical explorations, they also come together like *stories* in a collection. And stories imply movement and journeys through imagined time and space. Thus, collectively, these essays evoke and move through a vast global terrain, representing, for instance, Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Zanzibar, South Africa, Brazil, Ireland, Vietnam, Turkey, the Philippines, Japan, France, the Dominican Republic, and Senegal and Mali in Francophone West Africa, among other locations. These settings do not emerge in singular, static scenes, but are constantly re-imagined in the spaces of novels, plays, films, dance, beauty contests, documents, critical texts, and art installations, as well as in digital media “worlds” within new, algorithmic dimensions of time and space.

III. IMAGINING THE POSTCOLONIAL

Shaped by the image of the map on the cover, as well as by the metaphor of the globe in its title, *The Postcolonial World* seeks to represent the postcolonial (i) as a dynamic, multi-dimensional, decolonizing cultural and political force within the global imaginary; (ii) as a historical lens for reassessing configurations of power, hierarchy, and difference (iii) as a methodological/theoretical project – including postcolonial digital humanities – that disrupts dominant signifying systems; (iv) and as a collection of stories that imaginatively represents different, often marginalized, cultures and communities, while traversing across regions, disciplines, genres, periods, and representational modes and technologies. Drawing on this plural, multi-faceted conception of the postcolonial, the chapters in this collection are organized and clustered around eight thematic sections: Affective, Postcolonial Histories; Postcolonial Desires; Religious Imaginings; Postcolonial Geographies and Spatial Practices; Human Rights and Postcolonial Conflicts; Postcolonial Cultures and Digital Humanities; Ecocritical Inquiries in Postcolonial Studies; and Postcolonialism versus Neoliberalism. This structure is not intended to fulfill any strict demands of historical-literary or regional coverage, or to follow a chronology. Rather, the structural model we follow in this volume, while covering a variety of locations and temporalities, is aimed at drawing critical attention to topics and issues of particular relevance and interest to students and scholars. Some topics may be familiar, while others may be pushing in new directions, extending critical debates, and evoking new configurations for understanding *both* the history and conditions of the postcolonial world, as well as the theoretical formulations that hitherto have guided the study of the field.³⁸ Collectively the stories

that unfold in these chapters enable us to re-imagine the postcolonial world and the conditions of postcoloniality within a neoliberal global modernity.

The chapters in Part 1, “Affective, Postcolonial Histories,” in varied ways, use a postcolonial lens to re-think and interrogate traditional, empirical historiographical practices, often aligned to the nation, empire, or state. Instead, they examine how historical experiences come to life in affective, fictional processes of memory making. The inaugural chapter (1) of *The Postcolonial World*, entitled “On Postcolonial Happiness” by Ananya Jahanara Kabir, examines particular affect-worlds and sensory regimes – in this instance, while watching a *Samba* dance parade within the Rio Carnival in Brazil – and in doing so it expands the discussion further by provocatively interrogating the foundational condition of trauma and melancholy for the postcolonial subject. Kabir acknowledges that the founding experiences of the postcolonial states were often marked by violence, such as in the Partition of the Indian subcontinent (with Partition Studies itself being theoretically drawn from the earlier Holocaust studies). But she nonetheless calls for a “broader consideration of the place of happiness within postcolonial discourse. . . . [interrogating how] theories and analyses of postcolonial subjectivity focus overwhelmingly on the ‘unhappiness effect’: trauma and its aftereffects, oppression, displacement, and deracination, and pervasive melancholia as the result of long histories of being either colonized or colonizing cultures.” Calling for alternative paths to happiness, through “eros in the face of sorrow,” Kabir sees the carnival as providing one such source, in the “national spectacle of Dionysian proportions [as it] provokes and channels flow to provide secular modernity with a postcolonial version of Carnival as premodern ritual.”

The experiences addressed by the next two chapters (2 and 3), by Stef Craps and Rituparna Mitra, respectively, take another direction in exploring the limits and possibilities of postcolonial and Western trauma theories in the context of representations of suffering. Craps offers a detailed consideration of trauma theory at the outset: “A desire to promote cross-cultural empathy and ethical engagement underlies much cultural research on trauma, testimony, and witnessing that has been done since the early 1990s under the rubric of trauma theory.” For him, a central issue in this field is how to express “empathy with distant others,” and in this essay, Craps holds out hope for precisely such an empathy: in a nuanced reading of Dave Eggers’ *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (2006), the story of “a refugee from the Second Sudanese Civil War, one of the thousands of ‘Lost Boys’ who were brutally displaced during the conflict,” he demonstrates that what began as a project of oral history of Eggers’ interviews with his subject, turned into a first-person fiction. Despite the novel’s generic hybridity generating some controversy, Craps illuminates how Eggers is able to harness “feeling in the face of suffering,” “keeping the empathy loop open,” but without appropriating the experiences of his subject.

Mitra’s chapter offers an implicit “dialogue” with Craps’ reflections on trauma and empathy. In it she looks afresh at the South Asian Partition in conjunction with affect-mediated trauma theory as it applies to the feminist novel, *Sita Betrayed* (1960) by Qurratulain Hyder. Mitra argues that Hyder’s novel illustrates the entanglements of history, desire, and identity-formation by expressively combining affect and the trauma of Partition’s displacement in particularly *situated* ways. These affective histories embodying the Partition migrants’ response to their loss-infused sensory

worlds undermine the empirical narratives of the postcolonial nation while also interrupting Eurocentric theories of trauma. Hyder does so by mobilizing “tropes of the palimpsest and of montage to construct spatial and temporal projections of mourning, melancholia, and memory.”

Narratives of war, exile, and identity-formation are also the subjects of the final chapter (4) of this section by Amel A. Mahmoud, shaping the novel, *Shlomo al-Kurdi, Myself and Time* (2004) by Samir Naqqash, a prolific Iraqi Jewish author, who himself was caught up in the complex entanglements of ethnic identity and religious affiliation in the geopolitics of the Middle East. Born an Iraqi Jew, he was sent to Israel during the expulsion of the Jews in 1951, but he chose to write in Arabic, which in turn prevented him from having a bigger audience in Israel. The novel’s protagonist, Shlomo, a Kurdish Jew, in turn experiences the exile of Jews from Iran and Iraq, as well as ensuing conflicts between his ethnic and religious self-identification. In sum, if we consider the literary representations of such experiences in all the three novels that figure in these chapters in Part 1, they imaginatively map large swathes of the Global South, from South Sudan to India to the Middle East, evoking fictional boundary crossings that cut across a range of temporalities and locations, and are crucial in re-thinking and decolonizing received histories, whether of empire or of the state.

In Part 2, turning to a seemingly well-worn topic of “Postcolonial Desires,” one immediately thinks of a typical Orientalized, colonial imaginary in which the relationship of a colonizer (male) to a colonized (female) was often sexualized as a metaphor, functioning for intrusive desire enacted as a mode of power. Such sexualized images/narratives have a long history in the West, casting their spectral phantasm on colonial/postcolonial productions of desire, sexuality, and gender hierarchies, as evident, for instance, in East–West relations. The four chapters in this section, while cognizant of these Orientalist sexual stereotypes, *deconstruct* or eschew the Oriental/Occidental binary, highlighting instead the indigenous and/or queer gendering of desire, sexuality, and the ethnic body within a postcolonial frame, which in turn is often mediated by a global modernity. Here I mean that sexualities and sexual identities, as well as embodied practices such as beauty pageants, are not simply aligned to a specific nation, class, or period, but are refracted through multiple histories and representational modes.

In the opening chapter of this section (chapter 5), Abdulhamit Arvas offers an important perspective on the “queering” of postcolonial studies, showing both queer studies and postcolonial studies in productive interactions: “The queer resistance to stable sexual identification and the hybrid instability of a cultural and geographical belonging . . . productively bring together the postcolonial and the queer.” His choice of Turkey is distinctive, since it stands out as “a unique space that is *neither* a postcolonial state nor a European country. It is a space *in between* borders, be it national or geographical.” Specifically, Turkey, both historically and today, is at “a geographical crossroads between the so-called East and West and between Middle-Eastern and European traditions, blurring the lines between these dichotomies.” As a focal point of his inquiry, Arvas emphasizes a blurring of sexual identities and acts in a contemporary Turkish film, *Zenne Dancer* (2012), about the Turkish state’s policing of sexual categories, “which not only evinces the everyday lives and struggles of queer people, but also invites us to consider the complexities of different queer subjectivities (i.e. *ibne*, *zenne*) that coexist simultaneously in contemporary Turkey.” Drawing from

this analysis, Arvas then offers us a queer history of modern Turkey, illustrating how contemporary sexual identities and discourses are intricately interlinked with both Turkish traditions and state policies – as well as with Western, often Orientalized, constructions of sexuality and gender roles, often going back to the period of Western colonialism.

The subject of Sadaf Ahmad's chapter (6) is the figure of the *maghrabzada* or Westernized woman – a Pakistani woman who embodies Western values and characteristics – as a character in Pakistani films since the nation's creation in 1947. Focusing particularly on this popular character in the Pakistani films of the 1970s, Ahmad offers a complex account of the competing Oriental/Occidental tensions regarding women, sexuality, and gender roles in postcolonial Pakistan. On the one hand, the films of the 1970s drew upon essentialized images of the West and *maghrabzada* women, who supposedly illustrated the “dangers that befell those who adopted Western, a.k.a. ‘immoral’ values and lifestyle.” This ubiquitous trope, with a wide currency at the time, evoked associations between similar negative images of Westernized women produced by a popular religious preacher Maulana Mawdudi (1903–1979). In his discourses, ironically, in a reversal of stereotypes, the Western woman functions as Mawdudi's Occidental phantasm of sexual excess. At the same time, the moral discourse can be perceived as a cover that hides the desire for the other; the *maghrabzada* woman in Pakistan films, “who was vivacious and exciting, provided entertainment in very popular films, satisfying the male gaze even as she was derided for doing so.”

In the next chapter (7) in this section, Jan Christian Bernabe casts a decolonizing gaze at the history of U.S.–Philippine colonial/postcolonial relations mediated by a body of multidisciplinary artwork by the Philippine-born and Chicago-based Kiam Marcelo Junio, a Filipino postcolonial artist. A former U.S. Navy corpsman before the abolishment of the U.S. anti-gay policy, Junio appropriates “the term and act of camouflage as a tactical aesthetic strategy of subversion.” The artist also uses the plural pronoun, “they,” identifying “both as a postcolonial genderqueer or gender-nonconforming individual and artist” through their drag “alter-ego” Jerry Blossom, “a genderqueer Filipino femme-presenting persona . . . from an alternate post-queer, post-colonialist utopia/universe” – a world beyond the Oriental/Occidental binary. Junio's story, as interpreted by Bernabe, expands the domain of the postcolonial imaginary into multiple media, within which his artwork produces a contingent identity politics, “a queer survival tactical act,” an intervention of Filipino postcolonial subjects “foreign in a domestic sense” – and “always already queer in relation to the US empire.”

The final chapter (8) in this section, by Danny Méndez, follows the trajectories of postcolonial desires within a global modernity; however, his approach takes a distinct path as it does not emphasize sexuality per se. Instead, it explores the ethnic and national identity formations as they are mediated in the embodied practices of beauty pageants: here the curious phenomena of twin or sister beauty pageants for contestants from the Dominican Republic, the *Miss República Dominicana U.S. Pageant* produced from the U.S. and for the large Dominican diaspora, and the *Miss República Dominicana Universo* pageant held in Santo Domingo, the place of origin. The background to these pageants, as Méndez demonstrates, emerges from the legacy of colonization in Hispaniola (Dominican Republic and Haiti), accompanied by complex racial, ethnic, and cultural mixing and mixtures, which have spilled

over into the large Dominican diaspora in the U.S. Problematizing “diaspora,” a key transnational term of the postcolonial aftermath, this chapter asks: “Who is the real Dominican? What kinds of criteria and desires for beauty were being produced by these dual, sister pageants” in the two locations? The body of the Dominican beauty pageant contestant is part of a pageant circuit that is paved by global capital within modernity. On the one hand, she is the “Modern Girl,” a female figure of transnational desire, a “historical agent incorporating elements from disparate locations”; on the other hand, the diasporic beauty contestant must prove her “pure” ethnicity as a Dominican who belongs to the country of origin, the Dominican Republic, and whose national credentials are intertwined with colonialism and its aftermath.

Religion seems to figure very minimally in postcolonial examinations of categories that are foundational to Western knowledge formations – as compared to concepts such as race, gender, ethnicity, the other, etc. In Part 3, on “Religious Imaginings,” we take our cue from the opening chapter (9) by Timothy Fitzgerald in which he calls for an examination of some “postcolonial remains” that have been generally overlooked in postcolonial theory, in particular the rhetorical construction of the religion–secular binary. Postcolonial theorists have typically seen “religion” as a mystification of real power relations, in contrast to secular politics as the domain of enlightened praxis. The illusion of the neutrality and objectivity of secular reason, which has been the bedrock of postcolonial studies from its origin in leftwing movements, Fitzgerald argues, is also the basis for the liberal and neoliberal doctrines of capitalism. And, postcolonial theorists, who purportedly question all dominant knowledge formations, often rhetorically deploy categories such as religion, politics, and secularity in ways that recuperate and reconstruct the modern version of the civility–barbarity discourse. Thus, Fitzgerald perceptively demonstrates why even postcolonial theorists like Edward Said, who himself criticized associations between Orientals and barbarity, did not always question some modern constructions of religion that privileged secular reason, while naturalizing secular knowledge as “the common sense nature of things.”

So, are there ways of reading and imagining religious texts, events, and networks of influence – *beyond* the secular–religious binary? This question has particular urgency in Western readings of non-Western, “Oriental” religions, especially in this age of increasing Islamophobia. The following chapters in this section certainly encourage such readings by complicating the boundaries between religious and secular life. Milinda Banerjee’s historical chapter (10) focuses on the contemporary reception of *mangalkabyas*, a popular Bengali narrative genre from India, with its tales of different goddesses and gods and the manner in which they supposedly helped human beings (and sometimes animals) to gain prosperity and honor. Dating from the fifteenth through the mid-eighteenth century to the present, they were meant as much for oral recitation and singing (with large non-literate audiences) as for textual reading – initially retold in several variations. Contextualizing their evolution in the earlier period, Banerjee addresses the manner in which *mangalkabyas* have been interpreted by Bengali middle classes as well as “subalterns” in the postcolonial era, thus helping to decolonize political thought and activist practice in a Bengal caught up in the global modernity. For instance, specific modes of narrativizing social and ecological conflicts, articulated by the *mangalkabyas*, have proved strategically attractive to postcolonial intellectuals, ranging from Mahashweta Devi and Gayatri Spivak, as

they address the dangers and promises of global capital today. At the same time, the *mangalkabya* genre has also provided democratizing myths for political activism among peasants and sweetmaker artisans in contemporary Bengal. In sum, the genre continues to straddle a world of religious belief, popular entertainment, and post-colonial democratic politics, thus blurring the lines between literary/cultural secular texts and religious ones.

Meryem Zaman's ethnographic study in the next chapter (11) addresses the question as to why "increasing numbers of urban middle- and upper-class Pakistani women are veiling and participating in piety movements." These have gained "large followings in urban, postcolonial Pakistan, setting up faith-based institutions, schools, and private classes." But some of the tropes of cultural corruption focusing on a "pure" Pakistani culture have their origins in the independence movements and the earlier colonial period. Tensions between "revivalist/fundamentalist" women and their non-revivalist counterparts in Pakistan, reflected in debates in the public discourse, also figure prominently in Zaman's account, offering telling insights into constantly evolving roles of women along the religious and cultural fault-lines of the modern Pakistani state and society. In fact, this study is *about* the tensions – and the blurring of lines – between religious belief and secularism, as they emerge in "a vibrant public discourse regarding gender and Islamic piety." Thus, in this context Pakistan opens an important window (especially for Western readers) into how all these factors mimic changes in *other* Muslim countries with resurgent Islamic movements.

In Part 4 of *The Postcolonial World*, "Postcolonial Geographies and Spatial Practices," we consider the mediations of space and time within this world. It is a common assumption that "Geographical ideas about space, place, landscape, and location have helped to articulate different experiences of colonialism [and postcolonialism] both in the past and present, and the 'here' and 'there.'"³⁹ Mapping postcoloniality within neoliberal, global capitalism, we recognize the postcolonial world's increasing awareness of borders and boundaries, as well as of the relationship of cultural practices and products with spaces and places. Also keeping in mind Henri Lefebvre's theory linking the production of space to the social production of meanings and values, this section draws on politically inflected understandings of the ways in which spaces are "produced" and aligned with social power differentials within postcolonial contexts.⁴⁰ Finally, in an innovative move these four essays conceptualize space in varied, unorthodox ways, not simply focusing on material geographies, but by also drawing more *inclusively* on spatial images and the effects/affects of globalization with its varied networks of communication that evoke mobility and boundary crossings.

The opening chapter (12) by Garth Myers interrogates cultural geography's deployments of postcolonial perspectives by "elucidating several strands of discourse on East Africa's political and cultural geography, centering on the pivotal relationships between Zanzibar and Tanganyika, and between the Swahili coast and Africa." Literary voices (novelists Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Abdulrazak Gurnah, and more centrally, Muhamed Said Abdulla) offer a range of representations on these debates, which Myers further inflects via his discussion of the theoretical concept of "planetary indigeneity," recently introduced in postcolonial geography. Implying a "'generous and pluralistic' understanding of the everyday discourses and life worlds," in this case of "ordinary Zanzibaris and Swahilis," this term helps us in fully "grasping the contested cultural geographies of identity and belonging in this region." Overall, through

a focus on the Swahili writings of Muhamed Said Abdulla as they intersect with everyday “place-naming practices and performances of lived space in Zanzibar,” Myers offers a vivid picture of postcolonial Zanzibar through the lens of cultural geography, depicting the island nation as “far more than a place for contestation over the revolution, race, or divergent nationalisms.” And in doing so, he shows us how the “Zanzibar case helps us to make tangible this idea of planetary indigeneity, in the ways that both Abdulla as a Swahili novelist and ordinary Zanzibaris in their everyday lives place value in their worldly and inclusive indigenous world views.”

In the next chapter (13), Olivia C. Harrison uses the concept of “literary cartographies” as it applies to postcolonial Francophone studies, especially in works written by France’s colonial subjects and their descendants. “The conjunction of the terms postcolonial and Francophone,” Harrison argues, “also reveals limits inherent to both terms, limits that pertain to the ways in which we map the boundaries of fields of humanistic inquiry.” In addressing the gaps of these literary cartographies,” Harrison compares two French-Algerian plays – falling between the cracks of the Francophone and the postcolonial – that lend Palestine a central role in the drama of (post)colonial immigration, while revealing the porousness of the borders separating the colonial and the postcolonial, the Maghreb and the Mashriq, and the southern and northern shores of the Mediterranean. *Mohamed arfad valiztek*, by the dissident Algerian writer Kateb Yacine, toured throughout France and Algeria in the 1970s and ’80s, while Mohamed Rouabhi’s *El menfi/L’exilé* was staged in Occupied Ramallah and the French banlieue (low income residential areas in the periphery of major French cities) at the turn of the millennium. In these readings, Harrison reveals the intersections between the “politics of space and place” and identity formations, evoking an imaginary “transcolonial map” that blurs the boundaries between France-Algeria and Palestine.

The following chapter (14) by Carmela Garritano critically explores new realignments in spatial-temporal mappings within the context of postcoloniality and global modernity in the contemporary Nigerian movie industry, or Nollywood. Taking Nollywood seriously, Garritano argues, “may provide a more nuanced understanding of the transnational, informal, and everyday cultural ecologies taking shape under current regimes of global capital,” while helping us appreciate “the affective engagements, and spatial imaginaries emergent in the African postcolony.” Her readings of two Nollywood films, *GSM Wahala* and *Blackberry Babes*, not only highlight “cell phones in urban Africa and the development of mobile computing environments,” but in doing so, depict “the intersection of virtual, material, and geographical space in the networked African city where the cell phone motivates new forms of consumption and competition, as well as new vocabularies of self and agency in virtual space and mobile telephony in Africa.” The concept of the “networked city,” Garritano argues, is important in helping us reconfigure our perceptions of spatial practices in these dynamic conditions.

The final chapter (15) of this section, by Jonathan Zwicker, takes us to Japan, a place that does not typically figure as an important area within postcolonial studies. This essay on Japan’s engagement with Western modernity and its own colonial practices (in the nineteenth century and onwards), however, provides us with new, illuminating perspectives on East–West relations within colonial and postcolonial contexts. If Japan figured in the Orientalist imaginings of the West, Europe in turn

was central to Japan's Occidental fantasies. Here Zwicker creatively invokes two geographical regimes in the making of Japanese-European interactions – real and imagined: first, in the late nineteenth-century Japan “both academic and popular knowledge came to be recast within the framework of European modes [in which] geography was central: the world was reimagined as populated by a series of continents embedded within a Cartesian grid.” Second, when Japan emerged as a colonial empire on its own (at the end of the nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth century), “the theater played an especially important part in how cultural geographies were imagined in Japanese culture and society. This is in part because of the role that the theater played in literally embodying “Others,” bringing before the eyes of an audience exotic figures such as Shylock and Othello.” Furthermore the importance of the theater in thinking about cultural geography at this time drew from the common metaphor of *Theatrum Mundi*, or the “Theater of the World.” This image, shared by both East and West, here became emblematic of how Japan grappled with its place in the world of European colonialism. Informed by these complex engagements with cultural geography, Zwicker follows the career of Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935), a central figure in theater history and criticism and translator of Shakespeare in Japan, whose vision was shaped by the popular metaphor of the world as a stage.

“Human Rights and Postcolonial Conflicts,” the subject of Part 5 of *The Postcolonial World*, examines a topic that is quite logically aligned to postcolonial studies, given that, as critic Diana Brydon notes, “both human rights and postcolonial studies are disputed terms with many contradictory definitions and usages.” In any struggle for decolonization – a necessary process in politics, society, and the institutions involved in knowledge construction – imagining better and more equitable ways of living together invokes the issue of human rights.⁴¹ This section examines precisely this proposition: the consequence of postcolonial struggles for the rise of human rights in a neoliberal global modernity. According to human rights historian Samuel Moyn, the language of human rights has only acquired its universal moral authority since the 1970s with the disillusionment of anticolonial movements as nationalist struggles. In this sense, human rights give rise to “the last utopia” that the world community has seen, although its genealogical roots arguably go as far back as to the French Revolution or to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁴²

The three chapters in this section illuminate the challenges facing a human rights agenda, with a focus on specific postcolonial arenas of conflicts in two of the works, and a political analysis (Whyte) of the “place of colonialism” in the “conceptual redefinition of sovereignty as responsibility” in the third. All three chapters interrogate the Western claims on human rights in a postcolonial world, while pointing to the discursive instabilities as well as the fault-lines between theory and practice in the worldwide human rights regime as it currently exists.

A failure to grant human rights as a form of “inhospitality” is a novel approach offered by Ali Behdad in the opening chapter (16) of this section, as he exposes the contradictions and lacunae in the broader cultural politics of Muslim immigration in postcolonial Europe and the relationship of Muslim immigrants with their European hosts. Europeans often deny the term “immigrants,” replacing it with categories such as “guest workers,” “refugees,” or “strangers,” which in turn endorses discriminatory policies under the guise of “conditional hospitality,” particularly toward Muslims.

Such European attitudes, Behdad astutely observes, are based on complex discursive structures of denial and disavowal: “Europe denies that its everyday practices of hostility and exclusionary attitudes towards immigrants have always accompanied its sanctimonious discourse of tolerance . . . and human rights in the postcolonial era.” And these disavowing “discourses of immigration,” of “integration,” “assimilation” they claim promote “universal secularism, while insisting upon the unassimilability of Muslim others.” Finally, and importantly, Behdad demonstrates that Europe’s so-called contemporary problems with its Muslim immigrants is a re-articulation of the Orientalist, colonial binary of the colonizer and colonized, as the modern and secular European citizen versus the religious and traditional Muslim immigrant: thus, “the issue of the stereotype as an ideological form of ‘othering’ becomes significant as a mechanism of forgetting.” These Orientalist stereotypes, Behdad notes, clearly shape the representational practices across European society – academics, media, politicians – but nowhere do they have a more potent effect than on debates about the hijab or headscarf/veil. Represented as “a signifier of Muslim women’s oppression and religious backwardness,” it serves as “a site to construct and reaffirm a hierarchical and ‘civilizing’ relation between Europe and its Muslim immigrants.”

Perhaps nowhere does the discourse of human rights carry more weight and is also open to obfuscation and rhetorical manipulation as in the arena of public policy and international relations. Jessica Whyte, in the next chapter (17), offers a compelling account of a revived sympathy for “classical imperialism” and altruistic ideas about American imperial power among Western intellectuals during the lead-up to the Iraq War. Drawing from Edward Said’s critical review at this time, entitled, “Always on Top,” Whyte first points to Said’s cautionary reminder about the afterlife of colonialism and the extent of its effects on former colonies. “‘Who decides,’ he asked, ‘when (and if) the influence of imperialism has ended?’” In addressing this question, Whyte examines the “place of colonialism in the conceptual redefinition of sovereignty as *responsibility* that was pioneered by the South Sudanese diplomat Francis Deng, and his colleagues at the Brookings Institution” in 1989, culminating in the 1996 book *Sovereignty as Responsibility: Conflict Management in Africa*, which redefined sovereignty not as authority over a territory, but as the responsibility to protect a population.

Further exploring the “substitution of ideas of humanitarian intervention with the newer language of the ‘Responsibility to Protect,’” she asks “whether this newer language replicates the benevolent account of empire whose revival Said charts in ‘Always on Top.’” Deng’s work was very influential in international relations and was adopted by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), but Whyte argues that the ICISS Report “obscures both continuities with older forms of colonial intervention and the more recent forms of intervention into non-European societies.” Such lacunae become glaringly visible when seen through the prism of post-colonial theory, and by “its capacity to reveal such forms of continuity by resituating colonialism at the heart of the narrative of sovereignty and intervention.”

The final chapter (18) in this section by Claire Edington offers an analytical study with empirical evidence of the intersections between drug detention and human rights in postcolonial Vietnam, run by “a socialist market economy” – *doi moi* – inaugurated in 1986. It begins with a Human Rights Report released in September 2011, detailing human rights abuses in drug detention centers in Southern Vietnam. Entitled “The Rehab Archipelago,” the report produced a “bleak picture of the experience of drug

incarceration in Vietnam, marked by the long-term and arbitrary nature of detention in addition to forced detoxification and compulsory labor.”

In her analysis of Vietnam’s punitive carceral approach to drug use and users, Edington challenges understandings of Vietnam’s current approach to drug users as a reflection of a particular set of either Communist or “Asian values,” often portrayed in the literature as static and coherent ideologies, defined in their opposition to Western conceptions of human rights. Instead, she shows how discourses and state policies around drug use in Vietnam have evolved historically as part of a “global dialogue between external actors,” in which illicit drugs have long framed Vietnam’s relationship with the West. Interested in “the historical figure of the drug user and its role in the construction of national narratives” as well as “state efforts to manage the social fallouts of the embrace of neoliberal economic policies,” this essay looks afresh at “the dilemmas facing the global public health and human rights communities over how best to influence policy agendas in postcolonial Southeast Asia.”

“Postcolonial Cultures and Digital Humanities,” Part 6 of this volume, is a response to a new cross-disciplinary development whereby the digital modes of knowledge production can now offer postcolonial studies (as other humanistic fields) a path for moving beyond the discursive toward varied digital and media resources, and providing a new model of negotiating between theory and praxis. And conversely, postcolonial vocabularies and methodologies enable the digital field to understand the ideological aspects of gathering knowledge, for instance, in terms of its colonizing or decolonizing aims. We take our opening cue from Roopika Risam’s chapter (19) in which she defines postcolonial digital humanities as “a dialogue between global analyses of knowledge production within postcolonial studies and the praxis-driven digital field” that “engages with computational technology and digital media” for humanistic purposes. To explain, she offers an analogy in terms of “building,” a key term: “for postcolonialists, ‘building’ conjures acts of empire-building or nation-building, processes that shape the creation and dissemination of knowledge and incur suspicion of it.” But “if the act of ‘world-making’ is both empirical and ideological, what of the virtual worlds produced through digital humanities?” Such lines of inquiry followed by Risam (and others) offer some promising possibilities of an interface between the two fields: while the “world-making” of digital humanities is inflected by the postcolonial inclusion within knowledge production, digital scholarship “shows how knowledge production transcends the realm of textual inquiry through a methodology of making,” and through “methods of knowing, which are *beyond* discourse” (*italics mine*).

In the following chapter (20), Angel David Nieves and Siobhan Senior introduce us to a promising new project within the postcolonial digital humanities, “calling itself #dhpoco,” and which they label as “subaltern archives – digital projects devoted to ‘history from below.’ These projects are anti-elite, anti-colonial, and anti-essentialist; . . . concerned with questions of representation, identity, modernization, and power.” Given the almost revered status of Subaltern studies within South Asian postcolonial scholarships, this appropriation – or at least adaptation – of its label and premise signals a bold interdisciplinary agenda. And in doing so, Nieves and Senior demonstrate how digital locations can constitute “spatial and temporal activities within which colonial power can be disaggregated and examined.” Instead of “traditional print and paper archives and historiography, digital sites can be living documents allowing continual revision, contest,

and expansion and thus the inclusion of ever more voices and perspectives.” Informed by these goals and assumptions of flexibility and inclusion, the authors examine the promise and pitfalls of two quite disparate archival sites: *Writing of Indigenous New England*, “a crowd-sourced, online anthology of literature produced by the first peoples of this region,” and *The Virtual Freedom Trail Project*, which “documents the physical spaces (houses, apartments, offices) used in Tanzania during the struggle against South African apartheid.” While subaltern archives such as these are burgeoning, the authors caution against their co-optations, since their existence can also depend on funding mechanisms that can replicate colonial structures.

Finally, Adeline Koh’s chapter (21) opens with a tongue-in-cheek rhetorical question, “If Fanon had had Facebook?” Fanon’s challenge to dominant discourses of the time, Koh observes, would have got a strong impetus in the contemporary media environment, and in this essay she attempts “a larger conceptualization of knowledge distribution in digital ecologies,” whereby a proliferation of new outlets for information in digital space can lead to “relative ideological freedom” via the dissonances of multiple social media sites. Given that the “structure of the ecology of digital knowledge . . . prioritizes the *crowd* rather than giving control over to a small group of experts,” Koh labels it “rhizomatic” (from Deleuze and Guattari) and bases its creative energies on the *people* who create it. The thrust of her essay addresses postcolonial scholars to enter this “new frontier” of the Internet: “we need to move to the social space in which we fight this battle from postcolonial studies’ traditional territory, the colonial library of print, to that of the networked public sphere.” Like other digital scholars, Koh gestures toward methods of knowledge that extend beyond the discursive, and instead she makes a call to postcolonialists to stake claims on the Internet where “our perceptions and ideologies are constantly transfigured and reconfigured. It is here as well that the struggle against imperialism and self-determination in the twenty-first century must take place.” Beyond these three chapters, a further discussion of digital concepts and their applications in the humanities can be found in the concluding editorial essay of this volume by David D. Kim: “Remaking the Postcolonial World: Assembling, Networking, Traveling.”

Part 7, “Ecocritical Inquiries in Postcolonial Studies,” brings together the fields of postcolonialism and ecocriticism aligned in their critiques of colonization as it blended into global capitalism and neoliberalism, as well as in their analyses of the representational practices validating these movements. But this relationship is a complex one, as the authors in the section reflect and explain. For instance, they recognize that they are both also heterogenous fields unrestricted by any unified discourse. As Serpil Oppermann explains their differences below:

ecocriticism focuses on . . . the ways in which culture and nature are closely entwined. Postcolonialism, however, prioritizes an ostensibly anthropocentric vision, exploring cultural models and methods that account for the relations of power in the “discursive division between the First and the Third World, the North and the South,” as well as in the construction of forms of alterity . . . [and whereas] postcolonial theory has shown little or no interest in the nonhuman other, . . . in ecocriticism “[a]lterity is always also defined by the nonhuman other.”

Despite these differing orientations, all four chapters in this section point to a growing and productive dialogue between ecocritical and postcolonial perspectives and imperatives. Eóin Flannery notes in another chapter: “Embodying ecocriticism’s basic ecological commitments, postcolonial ecocriticism has expanded the postcolonial foci towards a more nuanced exploration of ecological conditions, ecological others, and environmental injustices in postcolonial cultures.” Kirk B. Sides also examines a dialogic relationship between the two fields in terms of their goals and imperatives:

The relationship between the camps of postcolonial studies and ecocriticism has been marked by a history of tenuous and often complex and difficult rapprochement. Indeed, the two critical constellations have struggled to find common ground upon which to think critically about *both* postcolonial studies’ historically-grounded critique of neo-/colonial nation states *and* the continuing engagement with forms of “green imperialism” and ecological exploitation that continue as part of larger discourses around environmentalism, especially in the postcolonies of the world. (My italics)

And as the two fields address these shared concerns about ecology and justice, they also demonstrate the power of the cultural imagination, specifically of literary works and the “affect-worlds” they create to work through the thorny conflicts involving ecological issues. Eóin Flannery’s opening chapter (22) examines the interface between ecology and capitalism in the “post-Celtic Tiger Ireland,” while reminding us of the intersections of Ireland’s colonial history and “a postcolonial history that belatedly became deeply entwined with the machinations, and ecological costs, of modernization and global capital.” He offers us two literary imaginings of the Celtic Tiger economy, “Ireland’s fateful embrace of unfettered and de-regulated capitalist ‘casino’ economics,” in Donal Ryan’s literary responses in *The Spinning Heart* (2012) and *The Thing About December* (2013). In “their respective representations of the troubling prehistory of, and subsequent fallout from, Ireland’s property ‘boom,’” Flannery reads these works as “‘imaginative’ critiques of the global and yet painfully local ramifications of the Celtic Tiger debacle.” For instance, the primary plot line of Ryan’s *The Thing About December* brings life to the property speculation during that period. Ireland’s past of colonial exploitation reemerges in the failed promise of the Celtic “boom” resulting in the postcolonial moment of capitalism’s ecological damage.

Serpil Oppermann’s chapter (23), as mentioned above, examines broad ecocritical and postcolonial trajectories: namely, “how ecological otherness results from the forces of global capitalism that create . . . environmental pollution extending into every metabolic system; and second, how the toxic body becomes a site where social and ecological dynamics intersect compounding postcolonial issues with material ecocritical concerns.” Illustrating her main argument – “how toxic bodies become ecological others” when they are exposed to hazardous chemicals and other alien substances – she offers brief cross-cultural analyses of two novels: the Turkish author Latife Tekin’s *Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills*, and American author Richard Powers’ *Gain*. Cultural differences of Turkish and American social worlds notwithstanding, Oppermann draws a broad picture of “the socio-ecological significance of the mesh of human and other-than-human environments,” illuminating how

these two texts “reveal vividly that hazardous material agencies are oblivious to all class, gender, culture, or species boundaries.”

Cajetan N. Iheka, in the following chapter (24) of this section, re-examines the intersections between postcolonial and ecocritical perspectives via an important issue facing postcolonial studies: “how to revise or at least rethink the anticolonial strategies of the old colonial and postcolonial liberation struggles?” And in this case, Iheka strategically questions violence as a method and agenda of postcolonial resistance in the context of the ecological struggles, often involving violence, taking place in the Niger-Delta in contemporary Nigeria. Iheka offers a crucial argument in the wake of similar resistances, often leading to violence, intended or unintended, by environmental groups such as Greenpeace and others worldwide. He provides historical reasons for his argument: “Since 2005, several militant groups have taken up arms against the Nigerian state and the oil companies for the degradation of the Delta environment.” Armed youth have protested via “bombing oil installations and oil bunkering, which involves scooping oil and selling the unrefined crude illegally, as well as kidnapping oil workers and politicians.” Threats posed by global warming and climate change, Iheka argues, call for a reassessment of such activities. In critiquing these violent resistances, crucial to postcolonial liberationist narratives of Frantz Fanon and others, the author uses ecocritical arguments proposed by Timothy Morton and others, to argue for “an activism that is based on the conceptualization of communities or collectivities based on a symbiotic relationship between humans and the world they inhabit.”

As in the other essays in this section, Iheka also draws on literary works to represent and mediate the political struggles of our times through ecocritical readings of two Niger-Delta novels, Isidore Okpewho’s *Tides* (1993) and Tanure Ojaide’s *The Activist* (2006). In reading these works side by side, he argues, we can understand the roles of the government and civil society engaged in issues of ecological and economic justice in formerly colonized spaces. In doing so, he argues for an ecocritically inflected, non-violent new “postcolonialism – both as a political and intellectual imperative – [one that is] attentive to the needs of both humans and nonhumans.”

Kirk B. Sides in the final chapter (25) of this section charts the entanglement of postcolonial and ecocritical concerns and paradigms within the *historical* genesis of modern “South Africa” in the early twentieth century, as represented in the novel *Chaka* (1925), a seminal work by Thomas Mofolo – and often characterized as the first African novel. Here Sides argues that not only does this work critique the racist policies of the early South African state, which was increasingly establishing its segregationist structures in the very *soil* of the nation, but also that Mofolo’s vision of a southern African ecology of relations between otherwise segregated Africans can be read as an important, genealogical moment in the history of ecological writing in and on southern Africa – writing that is useful to our contemporary, ecocritical concerns.

In an illuminating formulation, Sides explains, “while the state envisioned the modernity of South Africa based on policies of segregation – a geo-politics of separation grounded in the soil of this place that would later be consolidated under the banner of apartheid – Mofolo’s ecological vision locates the basis of historical relationality between southern Africans in the very same landscape.” Thus this chapter offers us an ironic replaying of the history of southern Africa; in casting a proleptic look back, Mofolo’s imaginings of a future relationship to the landscape of southern

Africa reveal complex narratives of encounter, collusion, and mixture between Africans as the century unfolds.

The novel *Chaka* is, at least partly, “the creative result of Mofolo’s travels through “Zululand” in KwaZulu-Natal, coming from his native Lesotho to do what might be characterized as ethnographic field work, performing interviews and compiling information on everything from military customs to folklore and fairytales of the region.” The narrative as it “self-consciously positions itself between the historical and the fictional, is the tale of the eponymous anti-hero Chaka, his birth, his ascent to unprecedented power and the cataclysmic effects this had on southern African geo-politics, ending finally in his dramatic death at the hands of his own brothers.” Approaching Mofolo’s novel in terms of an early “African ecological imaginary,” Sides emphasizes the novel’s ecological and environmental concerns, thus, enabling an important historical bridge between past and present.

Finally, in Part 8, “Postcolonialism versus Neoliberalism,” we return to the “specter” of neoliberalism that has hovered over many earlier essays in this volume. In fact, if various fields ranging from human rights to the digital humanities and spatial practices have drawn from the postcolonial conceptual vocabulary that explains the production of hierarchical difference, it is precisely to *demythify* contemporary economic and political processes that buttress neoliberal structures of naturalized and often obfuscating hierarchies and exploitation practices. As in this section Filippo Menozzi asks: “Can postcolonial theory help change this global situation, instead of merely mirroring or mystifying it?” All four chapters in this section, through varied foci of concern, recognize and expose the damage wrought by neoliberalism on various levels of social, political, economic, and cultural life. An investment in historical contexts also, it seems, draws each author to explore the colonial antecedents of neoliberal ideas and practices, while highlighting historical connections and affiliations with colonial and postcolonial structures that neoliberalism often seems to obfuscate.

For a definition of neoliberalism, we take our cue from the opening chapter (26) by Filippo Menozzi: citing David Harvey, he defines neoliberalism as a “theory of political economic practices” that identifies the attainment of well-being in “the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade.” His chapter expresses a renewed faith in postcolonial thinking as an interrogation of this neoliberal agenda, to “explore some interventions in the field of postcolonial studies that clearly identify the problem of world economic exploitation and argue for a reconnection between postcolonialism and Marxism.” In this Marxist inflection, he argues for a “historical materialist sense of the term,” which can prevent postcolonialism “from becoming a presentist ideology, a replacement of real historical understanding and social engagement against capitalism and imperialism.” Thus, his use of the term implies “a critique of the present in the form of historical consciousness able to challenge the idea that neoliberal doctrines are the only viable way of dealing with the crisis of capitalism.” To buttress his argument, Menozzi uses detailed evidence from Gayatri Spivak’s *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012) and some reflections from Hannah Arendt on historical legacies to explore “the dialectics of . . . opposition in an age of neoliberal globalization.” And what he hopes will emerge from these re-engagements with the postcolonial is “the creation of

values, meanings and practices that would not repeat the past, but rather reconnect the past with the future, recovering the hopes of struggles against imperialism.”

In the following chapter (27), Kenneth W. Harrow poignantly evokes the recent and ongoing crisis of migrants from Middle East and Africa to Europe, while reminding us that these were “preceded by many years by equally painful accounts of sub-Saharan Africans, many from West Africa, attempting to cross the Mediterranean to arrive in Spain, Italy, or Greece.” While historically, and as in the case of Syrian refugees, “the vast disruptions of warfare have accounted for massive movements of people,” here Harrow offers a fuller, more complex picture of emigration from Africa – with specific examples from Francophone West Africa – as a result of neoliberal economics that

have had a dramatic impact on the distribution of wealth in the world, and especially in Africa, where the newly minted wealthy classes live at an enormous distance from ordinary Africans. . . .

[And] in global terms, this gap in wealth has resulted in a new definition of space, with the Global North and Global South replacing postcolonial or “Third World” designations. “Europe,” formerly signifying the metropole, now refers to a fortress whose borders are intended to keep the “barbarians” at the gate.

Cinematic representations of West African emigrations to Europe, which are the focus of this chapter, evocatively bring to life the illegal passages “through illegal circuits, and generally focus on the difficulties of the journey to Europe, the exploitation of and risks faced by the voyageurs, and at times the premature end of the journey with many dying en route.” Three films (among several) that tell compelling stories are as follows: Mostefa Djadjam’s *Frontières* (2001) and Abderrahmane Sissako’s *Bamako* (2006) offer accounts of a group of Africans seeking to cross into Europe via Morocco, a number of them dying en route; and the journey by sea in Moussa Traore’s *La Pirogue* (2012) features the risks encountered by a group seeking to reach the Canary Islands by crossing the Atlantic from Senegal. These movies have provided the dramatic form their stories warranted, and Harrow conclusively points to the promise of these films, which constitute a new genre, namely “migrant travel films,” and which “will circulate, like the people whose experiences they have registered.”

The next chapter (28), by David Bering-Porter, offers a unique perspective. It examines and maps the processes of “self-fashioning that exist at the heart of the neoliberal economies of the self.” Taking the concept of “African Ancestry,” which denotes a specific colonial history that produced African identities via a history of slavery, Bering-Porter explores a corporate entity called *African Ancestry, Inc.*, which is “a DTC genetics screening company that specializes in testing the human genome for sequences of DNA that can be traced back to populations currently living in one of the 56 countries of the African continent,” and “whose client base consists almost exclusively of African-Americans.” The author labels this as “boutique ethnicity,” which “signifies the commodification and branding of ethnic identity and the valorization of these ethnic markers in order to effectively make a marketplace of and around the self.” Offering an important perspective on the role of individuals within neoliberalism as an ideology, Bering-Porter explains how the autonomy of the

individual and the market are key to its operations. Thus, he explains, “as a system of governmentality, the effects of neoliberalism can be felt at the level of the individual citizen or subject and, indeed, neoliberalism’s investment in the individual is a key part of its political power.” How does the colonial history of slavery and economic exploitation with echoes of neoliberal logic figure in these ethnic identities certified by the genetics screening company? While *African Ancestry, Inc.* tries to insert itself into narratives of self-emancipation for African Americans, Bering-Porter points out a crucial lacuna in its obfuscation of the actual history. “To effectively authenticate an individual’s ancestral connection to a present-day African country is simultaneously to cover up this history of colonialism, which is entirely responsible for the national boundaries of post-colonial Africa.” African Ancestry belongs to a larger shift in the way that ethnicity is thought within neoliberalism, “moving away from the (often) troubled and troubling history of race and colonialism towards a practice of genetic self-fashioning and boutique ethnicity.”

A different, economically oriented perspective on the intersections between neoliberalism, colonial history, and postcolonial studies is offered in the fourth chapter (29) in this section on “land-grabbing” in Africa by Kate Manzo and Rory Padfield. They begin with an observation taken from commonplace headlines: “Evidence of an expanding web of transnational land deals and corporate investments in Africa continues to grow in light of a recent report into this phenomenon. Launched in 2012, the Land Matrix Global Observatory database shows that six of the top ten countries targeted for investment are located in Africa.” Aiming to offer “a post-colonial perspective to the growing body of scholarship on contemporary land grabbing,” and evoking the centrality of land-acquisition to colonialism in the past, the authors frame this chapter within the larger question: “to what extent [are] these headline-making acquisitions . . . merely colonialism by another name”?

In different sections, the authors deploy empirical, including quantitative, evidence to explain “the causes of corporate land acquisitions in Africa including a case study on palm oil investments by foreign-owned firms; the means by which these acquisitions occur; and the accompanying narratives that seek to explain and legitimize increasingly contested land deals.” As an explanation for the economic transactions, however, Padfield and Manzo further demonstrate “how colonial binaries and imaginaries underpin the conceptions of progress, production, and property at work in current land deals and development policies.” Overall, the authors continue to argue that “the combination of legal, cultural, economic, and political means deployed by postcolonial African states to secure investments in land demonstrates strong links to the colonial past as well as to more recent neoliberal development agendas.” While Africa may have been considered “unusable” in the past, the authors see a different future: “broader changes in the world economy, such as the shift from ownership to control of strategic assets such as land and labor, suggest that capital expansion into once ‘unusable Africa’ is destined to remain an attractive option for investors.”

In charting the varying deployments of colonial/postcolonial history and theory, one can, quite strikingly, observe the *capaciousness* as well as the temporal adaptability of the terms “postcolonial,” “postcolonialism,” and “postcoloniality.” Running through all the essays are engagements with the emergence of postcolonialism as a field of study, with frequent invocations of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, and other writings by the first wave of scholars. Also evident are the productive and varied uses

of postcolonial terminologies as a means of applying conceptual categories such as “otherness,” “difference,” “decolonization,” among others, to a variety of disciplines and scholarly inquiries. Yet, as we try to grasp the boundaries of the “postcolonial world” – its scope, its material coordinates, and its historical trajectories – we experience a sense of unstable temporalities, of a story whose chronology keeps shifting, and a history from which we struggle to learn of the relationship between the past and present. In the following *Coda*, I briefly reflect on the rich temporal palimpsest that constitutes the postcolonial world in its interface with global modernity.

CODA: POSTCOLONIAL TEMPORALITIES

*That which then was ours, my love,
don't ask me for that love again.
The world was then gold, burnished with light –
only because of you. That's what I believed.
How could one weep for sorrows other than yours?
How could one have any sorrow but the one you gave?
So what were these protests, rumors of injustice?
A glimpse of your face was evidence of springtime.
. . . If you'd fall in my arms, Fate would be helpless.*

*All this I'd thought, all this I believed.
But there were other sorrows, comforts other than love.
The rich had cast their spell on history:
dark centuries had been embroidered on brocades and silks
Bitter threads began to unravel before me
. . . Don't ask me, my love for that love again –*

Faiz Ahmed Faiz – 1911–1984
(translated from Urdu, Agha Shahid Ali)⁴³

This iconic poem by noted poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz shaped the affective memories of several generations of South Asians and beyond. His life and poetry reflected the political struggles for social justice following the partition of the subcontinent – itself an iconic moment in colonial/postcolonial history. “The ‘Beloved’ – an archetype of Urdu poetry – can have multiple meanings, friend, woman, God.” In “this poem Faiz not only tapped into these meanings, but extended them so that the Beloved could figure as the revolution.” The speaker clearly expresses his desire for the Beloved and her beauty, though “granting love its due but *no more*.”⁴⁴

The affective register of this poem reflects a dissonance that is symptomatic of postcolonial temporal dislocations. The speaker wishes to immerse himself in the sensuous memories of his Beloved in a coherent, elegiac past of a world that was “gold,” but that eludes him; instead, the inexorable history of oppression intrudes into the present (“rumors of injustice”) and history can seem like a “spell” from which he and the Beloved cannot escape. But if the Beloved herself can figure as the revolution, then “waiting for the revolution can be as agonizing and intoxicating as waiting for one’s lover.”⁴⁵ Just as Faiz’s poem negotiates with a truncated past and present – inflected with the hope of a future revolution – postcolonial scholarship within the global, neoliberal modernity faces similar challenges. The narratives of

decolonization and resistance evoked an elegiac, affective history, however compromised, around which the Global South could constellate. The shared suffering of marginalization and oppression, and the values and ethics produced by resistance against the many injustices of colonization, have left some traces within the contemporary, divided world. But recuperating those postcolonial values or traditions is a challenge in this world-system, which undermines human rights, while re-inscribing racial, sexual, class, and cultural hierarchies. How can we build a future if, as many essays in *The Postcolonial World* suggest, the narratives of colonialism and capitalism simply blur into each other, whereby, as Faiz states, the “rich . . . cast their spell on history?”

This dilemma of postcoloniality today – of navigating “the past and future” – is aptly summed up by Filippo Menozzi in chapter 26 of this volume via a quote from Hannah Arendt: “our inheritance was left to us by no testament.”⁴⁶ According to Menozzi, “in the words of Arendt, this sentence captures the situation of the inheritor left with an important inheritance but no blueprint for action, no instruction about how it should be used and kept.” While the global neoliberal order – with its emphasis on newness and progress – may sometimes *feel* as if the ideals of decolonization are lost, it is imperative that postcoloniality retain its Janus-like perspective within global modernity, capturing both a nostalgia for a world of love “burnished with light” and the urgency of a present with its “rumors of injustice” (Faiz).

This is the key challenge that I believe that the postcolonial world faces, namely to *imagine* and create new transnational, cross-cultural, and cross-disciplinary communities mediating different temporalities. Even though we may not have a clear “blueprint,” how do we keep our commitments to the past, while becoming part of a constantly transforming postcolonial world? The authors included in this volume have attempted to address this question by imagining a range of affective communities that re-think hierarchies of difference, and by re-figuring modes of knowledge production in a range of explorations – in the material, textual, visual, and digital worlds. Finally, it is in the new domain of building – beyond the discursive and the textual – that there is perhaps further hope for new kinds of postcolonial interconnections via multiple temporalities. David D. Kim in his concluding essay demonstrates via a dynamic mode of “network visualization” – whereby one can map constantly changing relational coordinates – how this digital methodology might help us to chart the fluid currency of postcolonialism in global modernity. And in this volume of essays, we have just begun a new round of mapping this highly dynamic postcolonial world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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ENDNOTES

1. Text accompanying the cover image for *The Postcolonial World*. Installation and Text: Reena Saini Kallat, Untitled (Map/Drawing) 2011 – electric wires and fittings, 10 min audio loop 132 in × 456 in or 1335 cm × 1158 cm. The sound-based installation by Reena Saini Kallat from India represents the migration and large-scale movement of people around the world. “The movement, which is in this case represented by the flow of

electricity in the wires connecting different parts of the map, allows for disconnection of time from space in our lives and contact with other cultures. But at the same time, these movements are part of the wider processes of globalization that create new divisions between those migrants who are able to ‘fly’ and those who are just involuntarily leaked out of somewhere by its force.” (Exhibition Blurbs) (An iteration of this piece will be shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York from 1st October 2016 to 22nd January 2017. The exhibition is titled “Insecurities: Tracing Displacement and Shelter.”)

2. Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 2.
3. The paradigm of the “end of history,” which came out of the fall of communism, and evokes the triumph of liberal Western-style democracy, can be applicable to a Western consensus about the end of colonialism, and an accompanying denial of continuing neo-colonial constraints in the postcolonial era. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History, and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992; reprinted in 2006). His arguments are now considered useful in understanding the “war on terror” in East–West relations, as it was for the end of the Cold War. Also see “Bring Back Ideology: Fukuyama’s ‘End of History’ 25 Years On.” Eliane Glaser, *The Guardian*, March 21, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/mar/21/bring-back-ideology-fukuyama-end-history-25-years-on>
4. For a full discussion of this new periodization post 9/11, see Neil Lazarus, “Postcolonial Studies After the Invasion of Iraq.” Special Issue. *After Iraq: Reframing Postcolonial Studies*. Ed. Priyamvada Gopal and Neil Lazarus. *New Formations* 59 (2006): 10.
5. Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 1–15.
6. See *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), for key discussions on the history of the “nation” as a category of analysis as well as of the emergence of various nationalisms emerging in resistance to empire. The inclusion of Ernest Renan’s essay, “What Is a Nation” (1882), with its roots in positivist Enlightenment thinking, is countered in various essays and the animating vision of the book approaches the nation in terms of its symbolic structure, while conceptualizing national identity as unstable and ambivalent. Bhabha raises this question provocatively: “If the ambivalent figure of the nation is a problem of . . . its conceptual indeterminacy . . . then what effect does this have on the narratives and discourses that signify a sense of ‘nationness?’” (2).
7. Benedict Anderson’s book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), was influential in introducing the concepts of the nation and nationalism into the field of literary and cultural studies, especially within postcolonial scholarship. Postcolonial critics like Homi Bhabha offered analyses of the nation indebted to Anderson’s earlier formulations. See note 6. Also see note 3 for the influence of Fukuyama on these debates.
8. An example of liberationist, postcolonial writings in the 1950s, reflecting the influences of earlier figures such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and others, is articulated by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi, Kenya: East African Publishers, 1994), in a call for freeing indigenous African voices from the domination of the English language and culture.
9. Robin D.G. Kelley, “Introduction: A Poetics of Anti-Colonialism.” In *Discourse on Colonialism* by Aimé Césaire. Trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 17–18. For a biography of Aimé Césaire through an exploration of his works, see Meredith Goldsmith, “Aime Fernand Césaire, 1913–2008.” *Poetry Foundation*. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/aimae-fernand-caesaire>. Unpaginated.
10. Ibid. 17–18.
11. See Tracey Nicholls, “Frantz Fanon, 1925–1961.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer Reviewed Academic Resource*, for a full account of the intersections of the life and works of Frantz Fanon. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/fanon/>. Unpaginated.

12. I am using the term, “decolonizing the mind,” associated with Ngũgĩ’s later formulation, to describe a key aspect of earlier liberationist movements. See note 8.
13. Representative works of the authors mentioned here are listed in the References. For a connection between the poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz as a response to decolonization – and specifically, to the Partition of the Indian subcontinent, see Aamir Mufti, “Towards a Lyric History of India.” *Boundary 2* 31. 2 (2004): 245–274.
14. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 12–13.
15. *Ibid.*, 12–13.
16. Benita Parry, ed. *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London: Routledge, 2004), 6.
17. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 1–15.
18. Aijaz Ahmad, “Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Cosmopolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 27.30 (July, 1992), 98–116, 98.
19. *Ibid.*, 100.
20. *Ibid.*, 103.
21. *Ibid.*, 103.
22. *Ibid.*, 108.
23. *Ibid.*, 102.
24. Besides specifically theoretical critiques of *Orientalism* such as Ahmad’s there has also over the years been a pushback, often persuasive, by defenses of the project of Western Orientalists and valuable translation studies. I do not believe the intended or unintended consequences of Said’s book was or has been to launch a singular attack on all Orientalists. Thus, it behooves us to keep in mind studies on Orientalism: *Literary Orientalism, Postcolonialism, and Universalism* by Abdulla Al-Dabbagh (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), who offers a defense of the Orientalist project of Western translations of the great works of Oriental literature. And also see C. Edmund Bosworth, *A Century of British Orientalists, 1902–2001* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.)
25. Among his various body of critical texts in which he takes up these terms, one essay that brilliantly illustrates his conceptual and methodological range is Homi Bhabha’s “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817.” *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (1985): 44–165. Also see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994). See in particular his comments on mimicry and mimic men in “Sly Civility,” within the latter, 132–144.
26. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.
27. Partha Chatterjee, “Reflections on ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’.” In *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 84.
28. *Ibid.*, 84.
29. “This phrase was coined by [anthropologists] George Marcus and Michael Fischer to refer specifically to the uncertainty within the human sciences about adequate means of describing social realities.” See Thomas Schwandt, *Sage Dictionary of Qualitative Research*. <http://srmo.sagepub.com/view/the-sage-dictionary-of-qualitative-inquiry/n55.xml>. Unpaginated.
30. Graham Huggan, “Postcolonialism and Its Discontents.” *Transition* 62 (1993): 130.
31. *Ibid.* 131–132.
32. For examples of these critical interventions in postcolonial studies, see Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London: Verso Books, 2013); William Spurlin, “Broadening Postcolonial Studies/Decolonizing Queer Studies.” In *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*, ed. John C. Hawley (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 185–205; and

- Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
33. Some representative studies at the intersections of postcolonial theory and different critical and disciplinary perspectives in recent decades are as follows: Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*; Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change." *New Literary History* 43.1 (2012): 1–18; Arif Dirlik, "Rethinking Colonialism: Globalization, Postcolonialism, and the Nation." *Interventions* 4.3 (2002): 428–448; Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003); John C. Hawley, ed., *Postcolonial, Queer*; Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Michelle Keown, David Murphy, and James Procter, eds., *Comparing Postcolonial Diasporas* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
34. See Diana Brydon's blog 1/9/2012. Blog *Globalization and Cultural Studies*. <http://dianabrydon.com/2012/01/09/postcolonial-and-global-approaches-to-human-rights/>. Unpaginated.
35. Ibid.
36. Recently, more complex, cross-cultural articulations of indigeneity point to an expanding, comparative postcolonial vision. An interesting example can be found in Jodi Byrd and Michael Rothberg, "Between Subalternity and Indigeneity." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 13.1 (2011): 1–12. They call for an exchange between postcolonial subaltern (South Asian based) studies and indigenous American Indian Studies.
37. Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009), 2.
38. For the structure of this paragraph, I am indebted to the "Introduction" to *The Gothic World*, ed. Glennis Byron and Dale Townshend (London: Routledge, 2014), xxxviii, a book in the same series as *The Postcolonial World*.
39. See the blurb for the book, *Postcolonial Geographies*, ed. Alison Blunt and Cheryl McEwan (London: The Athlone Press, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003). <http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/postcolonial-geographies-9780826460820/#sthash.TNVYIMvD.dpuf>
40. See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), for a fuller account of his theory.
41. Diana Brydon, see note 34. She explores these issues in her blog page. Unpaginated.
42. Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2010).
43. Translation and commentary is by Agha Shahid Ali, *The Rebel's Silhouette: Selected Poems, Faiz Ahmed Faiz* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991). For an analysis of Faiz's meditations on history, see, in note 13, Aamir Mufti's "Toward a Lyric History of India."
44. Ali, *The Rebel's Silhouette*, xiv, xx.
45. Ibid., xiv.
46. According to Menozzi (chapter 26), "Arendt wrote her reflections on the issue in relation to the problem of the aftermath of the Resistance. Following a remark by poet René Char, Arendt proposed compelling meditations on the idea that 'our inheritance was left to us by no testament.'" Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (London: Penguin, 1977). See Menozzi's discussion of Arendt.

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PART I

AFFECTIVE, POSTCOLONIAL
HISTORIES



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CHAPTER ONE

ON POSTCOLONIAL HAPPINESS

—♦—
Ananya Jahanara Kabir

On the 2nd of March 2014 I was part of an extraordinary spectacle, popularly described as “the greatest show on earth”: the Rio de Janeiro Carnival, specifically, the competition in which schools of samba parade in front of a nearly 100,000 strong audience in a structure called the *sambódromo*. It was Sunday, the first of the two main days of the parades, reserved for Rio’s best samba schools (their ranking is determined through a combination of seniority and selection rounds). A Brazilian friend gifted me her entry ticket so that I, and an accompanying Spanish friend, could attend along with two friends of hers (tickets are limited and we had only four tickets amongst the five of us). This act of double altruism (a free ticket and the sacrifice of a place) was fuelled by my friend’s conviction that an opportunity to enter the *sambódromo* was so special that it had to be granted to the visiting foreigner. An element of national pride was definitely involved: to cede one’s place thus was to enable the visitor to understand Brazil in all its spontaneity, its generosity, and its capacity to generate happiness or *felicidade*. Closely linked to *felicidade* is joy or *alegria* – a feeling experienced in and through the body. During Carnival, *alegria* connects all those who give themselves up to a week of spontaneous and organized partying. The palpable force of *alegria* peaks during the parades in the *sambódromo*. As expressed in one of the samba songs I heard chanted that night, “sou brasileiro, vou festejar / Meu palco é a rua e a luz, o luar” (I am Brazilian, I will party / My stage is the street and the light, the moonlight). To party in this fashion, drawing on a mythical conjunction of urban planning (*rua*, “street”) and natural bounty (*luar*, “moonlight”), is the essence of being Brazilian.¹

I was in Brazil for a three-week period of fieldwork, which included the seven principal days of the Rio carnival. Through this experience crystallized certain observations about postcolonial happiness – its premises, its possibilities, even its impossibilities – which earlier visits to Brazil had already triggered.² In this essay, I present those observations, formulated in silent dialogue with my very different experience of postcoloniality in South Asia.³ I thereby lever the essay towards a broader consideration of the place of happiness within postcolonial discourse. Theories and analyses of postcolonial subjectivity focus overwhelmingly on the “unhappiness effect”: trauma and its aftereffects, oppression, displacement and deracination, and pervasive melancholia as the result

of long histories of being either colonized or colonizing cultures.⁴ Is this scholarship's only major insight about postcolonial cultural production? What are the choices – conscious and unconscious – that make us (re)produce studies of unhappy states of being through the postcolonial cultural archive, and what do those reveal about us as scholars? This essay thinks through postcoloniality by shifting the hermeneutic paradigm from trauma to *alegria*, and, in a concurrent move, from textuality to the body. In probing the mechanisms that generate a citizenry's sense of collectivity through the production of happiness, it asks, via the case of Brazil: what does it mean to insist that a person can be happy, that a nation can be happy? This examination cannot do away with melancholia altogether. In the words of one of Brazil's most-loved songs, which also invokes the carnival as paradigm, "tristeza não tem fim / felicidade, sim" (sadness has no ending, happiness does).⁵ We need to probe the relationship between happiness and melancholia, including their mutually interruptive temporalities, in the postcolonial frame. How does the promise of happiness battle with the ghosts of melancholia to form the postcolonial subject?⁶

THE ENCHANTMENT OF MELANCHOLIA

At the time of writing, a bibliographical search for "postcolonial happiness" throws up not a single hit. There seems to be no scholarly examination yet of the idea and possibility of postcolonial happiness that starts, not from a position of suspicion or skepticism, but from unambiguous acceptance that there can be "happiness" under the sign of postcoloniality. This observation is made not to insist on this essay's pioneering status, but to begin asking why this lacuna should exist. The study of postcolonial subject-formation was initially dominated by the dismantling of colonial discourses that were textual rather than embodied in their expression; these analyses, influenced by Foucauldian understandings of knowledge as power, focused on processes of colonial subject-formation through the subject's interpellation in these discourses, rather than on affective states of being.⁷ When, with the work of Homi Bhabha, psychoanalytical models entered the frame, the intention was to open up spaces of becoming rather than being. Bhabha foregrounded interstitial sites and liminal conditions whereby the colonial, and, subsequently, postcolonial subject could be seen as creatively responding to dominant regimes through surreptitious forms of retaliation ("sly civility") that exploited the potential of the margin (the "third space," the "in-between").⁸ The subsequent wave of scholarship that self-identified as "postcolonial" largely iterated the ubiquity of these practices in the colonial past and in the diasporic and (in keeping with the 1990s zeitgeist) the "multicultural" present. This continued focus on *process* meant that the emotional and affective domains of postcolonial subjectivity were in the vanguard of neither critical enquiry nor the fashions it triggered.⁹ When they ultimately did come to occupy the vanguard, it was overwhelmingly in the form of "bad" or "negative" affects and feelings: trauma, melancholia, alienation, disillusionment, and disappointment.

Since roughly 2000, postcolonial studies have been in dialogue with scholarship on collective memory, which in turn has been "closely connected with the study of the Holocaust and World War II, and, more recently, other wars, genocides, and dictatorships."¹⁰ Given that "wars, genocides, and dictatorships" have been the enduring leitmotifs of decolonization, it is unsurprising that scholars interested in probing

the conditions of postcolonial existence have frequently turned to the sophisticated methodologies for examining trauma that were developing as “Holocaust Studies.”¹¹ The founding moments of postcolonial nation-states, officially celebrated as glorious achievements of independence, were exposed as subtended by private and unofficial experiences of psychological and physical violence. The story of decolonization was unmasked as profoundly traumatic with ever-evolving repercussions.¹² The overdetermination of the “postcolonial” by “South Asia” means that the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 has dominated this turn. A strong alliance with feminist politics also developed.¹³ Even as the theoretical apparatus for “Partition Studies” was taken from Holocaust Studies and its *loci classici* for the investigation of trauma, particularly Freud on mourning and melancholia, empirical evidence was furnished by retrieved histories of fugitive experience, especially those of women, by South Asian feminist writers, collectives, and publishing houses.¹⁴ Their powerful example dominated scholarly interventions into the politics of memory and forgetting around South Asian postcoloniality. The Indian Partition became the privileged site for investigating the South Asian postcolonial experience as fundamentally traumatic and minoritizing;¹⁵ more recently, the War of Bangladesh’s Liberation in 1971 and other manifestations of eruptive violence, such as the Naxalite Movement, are being drawn into the confluence of postcolonial studies and trauma studies.¹⁶ In the meanwhile, a new memory studies has emerged through a renewed (pre)occupation with sites of twentieth century traumas that have undergone political, if not memorial, changes in the post–Cold War period.¹⁷

If trauma has become established as the foundational condition for the postcolonial subject, its corollary affect has been articulated as melancholia. Scholarship has revised and complicated the original Freudian binary between (“good”) mourning and (“bad”) melancholia, and a range of vernacular effects has also been proposed as valid modes of articulating melancholic affects.¹⁸ Despite these revisionisms, the negative quality of melancholia remains undisputed; indeed, it is understood as intimately constitutive of its hermeneutic potential – as in Ranjana Khanna’s discussion of “critical melancholia.”¹⁹ The focus on melancholia has allowed the retrieval of individual postcolonial experiences that have been, in the words of Salman Rushdie, “brushed under the carpet” of nationalist master-narratives.²⁰ Furthermore, there is a new convergence between postcolonial and queer investments in the disruptive capacity of melancholia and allied unhappy affects. Most prominent here is Sara Ahmed’s influential book, *The Promise of Happiness*, which declaredly writes from a position of “skeptical disbelief in happiness as a technique for living well,”²¹ and rejects the temptations of the “happiness archive” to “follow,” instead, “the weave of unhappiness, as a kind of unraveling of happiness, and the threads of its appeal.”²² Assembling “feminist killjoys,” “unhappy queers,” and “melancholic migrants,” Ahmed’s inquiry into the “promise of happiness” is, despite the book’s title, a thoroughgoing critique of happiness. While it is not clear what a revolutionary utopia from this perspective might entail, it certainly includes a call for the “freedom to be unhappy.”²³ Ahmed does admit in closing that “the struggle against happiness as a necessity is also a struggle for happiness as a possibility,” which might materialize if we adopt a “politics of the hap.”²⁴ Yet this concluding move is one of infinite deferral, reducing the “happy” (a feeling in the here and the now) to the “hap” (always tinged by contingency and futurity).

HOW DO YOU SOLVE A PROBLEM CALLED “HAPPINESS”?

Evidently, there are problems with happiness. There exists within Western metaphysics and ethics a long tradition of taking happiness seriously, but where this tradition has passed on to contemporary philosophers, their arguments about what constitutes happiness are conducted (typically) in the philosopher’s discursive mood of abstracted idealism.²⁵ There seems to be no clear methodological route for the transfer of their insights to analyses of contemporary societies and their cultural production in the age of advanced capitalism: those seeking to critique happiness simply catalogue this tradition, reference its most recent avatars, and move on to make their own arguments for happiness as inherently problematic.²⁶ A starting point in these arguments is the intellectual orientation of those who, these days, study happiness, and how they do so. “Unlike work in queer and ethnic studies on affect,” declares an essay that places itself squarely in that scholarly company, “the new science of happiness is profoundly positivist.”²⁷ Pitting themselves against such positivism and its advocacy of “emotional conformism” and “enforced happiness,”²⁸ the new approaches to affect within “queer and ethnic studies” cannot but emerge as cutting-edge. Happiness is passé, and even melancholia too limiting, perhaps, for those embarked on valorizing “the politics, aesthetics, and projections of political depression.”²⁹ The critical prose of these projects reveals a deep rhetorical and emotional investment in the privileging of instability and indirection: thus Lauren Berlant explicates “cruel optimism” as the “exuberant attachments . . . that keep ticking as a rhythm people can enter into while they are dithering, tottering, bargaining, testing or other being worn out by the promises they have attached to the world.”³⁰ Within this unstable, exhausted worldview, optimism can only be figured as “cruel,” any politically admissible joy must perforce be “queer,” and, as Elizabeth Freeman astutely observes, “pain . . . the proper ticket into historical consciousness.”³¹

The scholarship we can identify as “melancholic queer theory” stakes its rejection of happiness on the latter’s co-optation by advocates of heteronormativity. Heather Love points out that “new work on the psychology of happiness demonstrates a link between marriage and overall satisfaction”; likewise, Ahmed invokes similar studies to observe – with evident sarcasm – that “one of the primary happiness indicators is marriage.”³² This is a valuable emphasis within queer critiques of happiness, which carries the added benefit of clarifying the related co-optation of happiness by the philosophy and practice of capitalism. From Jeremy Bentham’s “greatest happiness of the greater number” to Adam Smith’s contrast between pre-capitalistic “miserable inequality” and capitalism’s advancement of “happy inequality,” classic utilitarian treatises contain memorable axioms concerning the quantification and definition of happiness as an emotion that links the aspirations of individuals to those of a society.³³ The discursive alignment of marriage, family, and society through their congruent search for happiness, as crystallized in a harmonious flow of demand and supply of commodities, is regulated by the interpenetration of market and libidinal economies.³⁴ However, the need to project and participate in a happy society is not restricted to capitalism; indeed, its socialist mirror images suggest that the instrumentalization of happiness is a problem of modernity itself.³⁵ Most crucially, the building of global modernity on the institutions of slavery and colonialism, and their moral

justification through constructs of the “happy slave” and “contented colonial” reveals a problematic happiness lodged in the heart of the modern. “[T]he simulated jollity and coerced festivity of the slave trade and the instrumental recreations of plantation management” lay bare “the entanglement of terror and enjoyment” in the perpetuation of the slave trade.³⁶ Saidiya Hartman’s account of the African slave’s imagined inner resources for innate happiness – “childish, primitive, contented, and endowed with great mimetic capacities” – is an equally valid description of the ideal colonial subject from the colonizer’s perspective.³⁷

Queer theory’s insistence on “the right to be unhappy” as a political response to capitalism’s demand for “compulsory happiness,”³⁸ and a historicist and materialist understanding of the basis of this demand, together make happiness a tricky subject for postcolonialists wishing similarly to speak from the margins, especially if they are already committed to the hermeneutic power of melancholia. For scholars of an activist bent, their battles with the nation-state’s powerful exclusions and neo-colonialisms leave little room for thinking about happiness and allied positive affects. Additionally problematic is the semantic relationship between “happiness” and those allied affects, including “pleasure,” “exhilaration,” and “joy” (all of which terms are subsumed under the Spanish and Portuguese word I have used earlier – *alegría*). These latter terms constellate around an underlying sense of the physical and the sensual that complicates an understanding of what constitutes the field of happiness as an analytical domain.

Suffering remains the almost exclusive preoccupation of professional psychology. Journals in the field have published forty-five thousand articles in the last thirty years on depression, but only four hundred on joy. There was one form of pleasure that deeply interested psychologists, from Freud on, and that was sexual pleasure.³⁹

Within scholarship of all kinds, the commonest way to take happiness seriously has been to sever it from pleasure and its physical connotations, which, in turn, are all too often confined to the sexual domain. The narrowing of “pleasure” to “sexual pleasure” consolidates, paradoxically, that very connection between heteronormativity and happiness that it sought to break. Ironically, it also comes to the rescue of those trying to wrest some form of queer happiness from their critiques: “in addition to creating new forms of happiness,” declares Love, “we have developed a remarkable ability to live without happiness.”⁴⁰ When different orders of happiness tie up argumentation in knots, the separation of “pleasure” from “happiness” helpfully intervenes: “contemporary queers may find themselves in the odd position of making a claim for the right to be unhappy. In any case we have tended to find our pleasures elsewhere.”⁴¹

EMBODIED AND COLLECTIVE PLEASURES

I contend that to separate pleasure from happiness – ultimately, a Cartesian reflex of the Enlightenment severance of the mind and the body – is to miss the opportunity to decolonize the mind and body through a politics of happiness redefined as embodied, collective pleasure. Any critique of happiness that invokes this separation

must be critiqued in turn for ignoring the radical potential of a happiness infused with pleasures emanating from the body's immersion in physical activity: the state of being that Mihály Csíkszentmihályi has defined as "the flow." Csíkszentmihályi's assertion that "the almost unlimited potential for enjoyment that the body offers often remains unexploited" holds true for scholarly approaches to subject-formation under advanced capitalism.⁴² "Everything the body can do is potentially enjoyable," observes Csíkszentmihályi; our quality of life is enhanced through a cultivation of the body's "inherent ability to provide flow unexploited."⁴³ This sensual understanding of the flow aids our strategic delinking of pleasure from the purely sexual realm (imagined through the coupling of two bodies), and its return to a broader sensory domain. Recall Marx's comments on how the libidinal economies of capitalism alienate us from our sensory faculties:

"when it [private property] exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc., in short, when it is used by us . . . in the place of all physical and mental senses there has therefore come the sheer estrangement of all these senses, into the sense of having."⁴⁴

The repossession of these senses, but by the individual functioning within the collective rather than as part of the heteronormative (and hetero-aspirational) marital unit, constitutes powerful strategies and practices of everyday resistance that, nevertheless, bypass our scholarly radar if we are fixated on melancholia. The postcolonial theorist needs to ask, instead: what flow-producing practices exist in postcolonial societies, and how do we theorize, from them, radical happiness as a *modus vivendi*?

As Achille Mbembe has best demonstrated, the postcolonial subject possesses multifarious resources for resisting neo-colonial hegemonies by exposing power's capitulation to the frailties and necessities of the body. Through the embodied micropolitics of mockery and play, the postcolony's demos survives the exigencies, precariousness, and petty humiliations of the everyday.⁴⁵ I mobilize Mbembe's awareness of the postcolonial efficacy of the Bakhtinian "lower body realm" into an exploration of how postcolonial subjects perform the ritualistic assertion of a deep-seated right to be happy, despite their routine interpellation within socio-economic structures that function by systematically disempowering them. I agree with Rosi Braidotti that "happiness is a political question and the role of the state is to enhance and not hinder humans in their striving to become all they are capable of."⁴⁶ The echo of Amartya Sen's "Capabilities" approach here finally brings us to a philosophical restatement of the necessity of happiness within a framework that can actually sit within postcolonial conditions.⁴⁷ The utopian moment of decolonization regularly articulated – typically, within elaborate Constitutions – the postcolonial state's responsibility to ensure that humans are not hindered in a legitimate quest for happiness (either defined as a series of non-restrictive rights or, as in the case of the US Constitution, as the right to happiness *tout court*).⁴⁸ As the realities of postcolonial nationhood unfold ethnic strife, class- and identity-based discriminations, and environmental degradation, what is exposed most egregiously is a state that promotes capitalism and its own definition of a commodities-based "happiness" without any ethics or alternative ideologies to counter the tendency towards selfishness and individualism that capitalism encourages. The postcolonial moment of utopia, founded on the trauma of

violent decolonization, then becomes an endlessly open moment for the recapture of the original feeling of “anything is possible.” A postcolonial practice of happiness can be located in a return to that moment not driven by melancholia, but by the need to retrieve and postulate “happy memories.”⁴⁹

Seeking “an alternative to the emphasis on suffering in much academic literature on memory,” and to the “largely negative understandings of the emotions of memory” that scholars have offered while “identifying trauma [as] the defining condition of our times,” Carrie Hamilton advocates a scholarly turn to happy memories.⁵⁰ The political meaning of such memories need be neither “reactive,” nor associated with a “naively cheerful view of history,” nor indeed involve “a denial of oppression.”⁵¹ Rather, for Hamilton, “[f]ar from being the prerogative of the privileged, happy memories may be especially important in sustaining political projects of the oppressed.”⁵² Here, she cites Yolanda Pierce’s reading of the reminiscing of “happy” times in post-bellum accounts of US slavery as a coping mechanism for “the brutality of the lingering impact of slavery in order to maintain a semblance of hope for the future.”⁵³ Such alternative approaches to happiness and its recollection can help us redefine what Freeman identifies as inappropriate eruptions of “eros in the face of sorrow as traces of past pleasures located in specific historical moments.”⁵⁴ For Freeman, the “powerful turn toward loss – toward failure, shame, negativity, grief” within queer studies turns away from a “seemingly obsolete politics of pleasure” and indeed “acquiesces . . . to a Protestant ethic in which pleasure cannot be the grounds of anything productive at all.”⁵⁵ Her reading of the post-Freudian psychoanalysts Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok surpasses that offered earlier by Ranjana Khanna’s reading of “critical melancholia” as postcolonial palliative to propose, instead, “erotohistoriography as a model of reparative criticism.”⁵⁶ However, the utility of Hamilton’s “happy memories” and Freeman’s “erotohistoriography” is restricted by textual examples and exegesis that remain tied to the pleasures of queer sexuality. Using the concept of the “flow,” as described earlier, I have moved pleasure away from this narrow application to private relations between two people, while retaining the insights of Hamilton and Freeman to illustrate the postcolonial reclaiming of happiness as political, embodied, inclusive, and collective pleasures.

THE SAMBA PATH TO HAPPINESS

I return, finally, to Rio de Janeiro’s *sambódromo*. What I experienced there was a highly regulated, synchronized production of happiness, spatio-temporally organized along the length of the structure (roughly 700 meters of the Avenida Marquês de Sapucaí, the street on which the *sambódromo* is constructed), and the period of time each parading school has at its disposal (an hour). My participation began by draping on my entry ticket, a laminated affair ready-strung with a neck cord, bearing a barcode and a number, which indicated which part of the structure the ticket-holder was meant to occupy and also determined one’s entrance turnstile. On scanning the barcode at the turnstile, volunteers handed us: a booklet of lyrics, the parading schools’ flags, condoms, and a plastic bag to keep everything in. Passing through a foyer-like area with a band and food and drink stalls, we entered the *sambódromo* through one of several portals underneath massive concrete tiers that rise from the ground level

upwards for the length of the structure. These banks of tiers are divided into numbered sectors which are priced differently depending on its view – though it is also a matter of taste whether one wants to be close to the *concentração* (Concentration), where the schools assemble before starting; or at the end, marked by the *praça do apoteose* (Apotheosis Square), where they shed their feathers, baubles, and wings and become ordinary human beings again; the best seats are in the central sectors, which not only command a panoramic view of the start and end of the parades, but also offer the best effect of the *bateria*, or drumming section, which comes in at the midpoint of each parade. While the sectors are standing-only, there are some seats near Apotheosis Square for those who cannot stand for long, and in the luxury cabins (*camarotes*) that line the avenue's right-hand side.⁵⁷

Vertiginous floats, sumptuous costumes, dazzling lights, insistent drums, and the swell of singing voices: during my night-long sojourn in Sector 11, time was occupied not by hours, minutes, and seconds, but by parades, *alas* (“wings” differentiated by costume and choreography), and rows of dancers. The parades unfold in harmony with the spatio-temporal specifications of the *passarela do samba* (Samba Path): schools are penalized for under-utilizing or exceeding an hour, or for gaps that open up between rows or wings. Each of the other elements which schools are judged on, including categories such as *fantasia* (costumes), *alegoria* (the realization of allocated allegorical themes), *bateria* (drumming), *harmonia* (harmony between the different elements) and *comissão de frente* (“front commission,” or the dancers leading the parade), consolidates this alternative temporality. It is sustained through synesthetic exhilaration that peaks midway with the pulsating *bateria*'s appearance, and is given voice through c. 90,000 spectators singing the carnival songs (*sambas de enredo*) nonstop. On the compact disc containing the year's *sambas de enredo*, released annually prior to carnival, each song lasts roughly six minutes; but its repetition ten times during the parade means that, very quickly, even neophytes who have not memorized their favorite songs during the preceding months can – aided by the free booklet of lyrics – soon join in. As the parades conclude at the aptly termed Apotheosis Square, the ritual time of Carnival is complexly intertwined with the linear time of the *passarela* and the mercantile time of the compact disc's release and consumption.⁵⁸ This braiding of several capitalist temporalities is an example of vernacular modernity's “stitches on time,”⁵⁹ and it is intrinsic to the *sambódromo*'s production and consumption of excess: “the carnival is like a giant popular opera, with so much happening, musically and visually, that you cannot possibly take it all in at once.”⁶⁰ In surpassing both “the chronopolitics of development” and “postcolonial notions of temporal heterogeneity,” Carnival's temporal and performative complexity also plays out a version of Freeman's “erotohistoriography” – as I explain below.⁶¹

“Against pain and loss, erotohistoriography posits the value of surprise, of pleasurable interruptions and momentary fulfillments from elsewhere, other times.”⁶² So does Carnival. The other places and times recalled in the *sambódromo* are specific to Brazil's national myths of cooperative miscegenation and racial democracy, nourished by tropical fecundity.⁶³ As with every year, 2014's *sambas de enredo* expounded themes of racial diversity, natural bounty, and the maintenance of harmony between people and nature through African-derived percussive rhythm.⁶⁴ “Bateu mais forte o coração / tocou, senti a vibração da África” (the heart beat faster / it played [like

an instrument], I sensed the vibration of Africa). These emphases were reaffirmed through the costumes and physical types of the dancers, their samba steps on the ground and on the teetering floats, and the almost infrared bass of the *bateria's* *surdo* drums.⁶⁵ United by the deep vibrations coursing through our bodies, I sang alongside a housewife from the Amazonia, a female doctor from Brasília, and other sector-companions. We sang of “coisa de pele, batuk ancestral” (that thing of the skin, ancestral African rhythm); of “o índio quem admirou a imensidão da beleza local” (the [Amer]Indian who admired the immense natural beauty) as she played innocently by the sea; of the *favela* (slum) where the “bisneto de imigrantes” (the great-grandchild of immigrants) offers the gift of miscegenation (“a miscigenação eu vou brindar”); and, of the parade itself, which re-enacts Brazil’s history from the arrival of the Portuguese to the consequent syncretism between “o nosso Senhor” (our Lord Jesus) and “rainha Iemanjá” (Yemaya, Afro-Brazilian goddess of the sea), resulting in creolized dances (“quadrilha,” “forró”), fighting games (“capoeira”), instruments (“sanfona,” “zabumba”), and saints (“São João”). We sang of the uniting force of the percussive beat, the *passarela's* performative power, ancestral musico-kinetic cultures, of new identity forged on Brazilian soil and reaffirmed through the city, and, of course, of happiness: “eu sou feliz” (I am happy).

TERRA BRASILIS: A NEW WORLD IS DAWNING

As the night transformed into *madrugada* (“early morning,” Spanish and Portuguese), the invocations to newness within the lyrics we chanted brought forth a new dawn, tinged by the promise of social progress: “orgulho, respeito, igualdade / tremula a bandeira da diversidade / um novo tempo nascerá” (pride, respect, equality / the flag of diversity flutters / a new era will be born). Repetition – of movements, of lyrics, of themes, of myths, of newness – was key: “É carnaval, estou aqui de novo” (It’s carnival, I’m here once again). The Portuguese way of saying “once again” blurs newness and repetition, answering in a very Brazilian way that postcolonial question: “how does newness enter the world?”⁶⁶ This apotheosis through repetition is anchored in the “batucada do samba” (the African-derived samba rhythm), celebrated that evening in the opening song – “Batuk” – by the school Império da Tijuca: “na ginga do corpo / na batida no pé, axé, axé! Eleva a alma, o canto e a dança / unindo as raças na fé e na esperança” (in the sway of the body / in the march of the feet, “axé, axé!” Song and dance elevate the soul / uniting the races in faith and in hope). The song is a performative speech act *par excellence*: the words are articulated to the swaying bodies and stepping feet of dancers and the spectators alike. In the alternative temporality of Carnival, the collective archive of our bodies unfolded the movement from African *batuque* to modern *batucada* – a Brazilian sonic history realized through the space in which it is sung and danced. In the words of the lyrics booklet as it introduces “Batuk”: “Afim, em nenhum outro lugar esse som é tão brasileiro quanto na Marquês de Sapucaí” (In the end, in no other space is this sound as Brazilian as when in the Marquês de Sapucaí). The *passarela do samba* becomes a synecdoche of *terra brasilis*. The term, first used by European explorers to designate a pre-conquest, paradisiacal Brazil, is a concept that haunts the Brazilian creative imaginary: note, for instance, its use as album title by Tom Jobim, one of Brazil’s iconic bossa nova musicians and lyricists.⁶⁷

Jobim, together with his collaborator Vinicius de Moraes, also created the bossa nova song “A felicidade” (To Happiness) whose memorable declaration, “sadness has no ending / happiness does,” I quote at the beginning of this essay. The happiness of the poor is like the “grande ilusão do carnaval” (great illusion of carnival): people work for an entire year to create the costumes, music, and dance that build up the illusion, only to have it crumble into nothingness on Ash Wednesday: “tudo se acaba na quarta-feira” (everything finishes on Wednesday). The delicate melody in bossa nova minor notes brings out the ephemeral nature of both fantasy and the happiness erected on these sandcastles; yet, its invocation of cyclical carnival time assures us that, *de novo*, once again, next year, happiness will return. *Terra brasilis* will be renewed, even if fleetingly. Beneath the minimalist bossa nova arrangements, moreover, is the “batucada de samba”: the African-derived syncopations insinuated into European 4/4 time through the soft insistence of hand-held rattles and shakers filled with the seeds of indigenous trees. The edifice of bourgeois melancholia stands on this shuffled counterpoint that rhythmically weaves in the memory of happiness. This memory finds its full-throated expression in the *sambódromo* as we chant, along with the Império de Tijuco, “axé, axé!” – a pan-American expression of African-derived spiritual energy.⁶⁸ Yes, the song’s celebration of inter-cultural mixing under the moonlit maroon village is a placeholder for the interracial and ecological violence that constitutes the original trauma of Brazil’s foundation on *terra brasilis*. Yes, Brazil is an unequal society still marked by the effects of slavery and socio-economic marginalization on its Afro-Brazilian population.⁶⁹ But the performative affirmation of happiness through the ritualistic, embodied recollection of the foundation myth also validates the political potency of happy memories: “such memories may act as an ingredient in formulating alternative futures. Nostalgia does not necessarily represent an idealization of the past but incorporates the emotional tensions within memory itself.”⁷⁰

Following Carnival, an article in *Le Monde* analyzed the Rio parades as the markers of a city divided between poor Afro-Brazilian favelas straddling the *morros* (hills), and the rich white Zona Sul fringed by famous beaches.⁷¹ My experience confirmed the opposite: that the parades and their audience periodically suture a divided society. A Chilean-French friend who participated in one of the parades I witnessed eloquently repudiated *Le Monde*’s perspective:

the samba schools are all from poor neighborhood “comunidades”; everybody knows that and acknowledges that they are a Black heritage . . . since 70,000 people participate, 4000 for each school, a lot of people from the favela communities participate for free, or almost free. There are as many dancers as people sitting on the *sambódromo*.⁷²

The generation of an embodied, collective pleasure as the route to happiness, however protean, needs a critical mass comprising all components of Carioca society, and leaves lasting traces on the urban landscape. “Where else in the world do you have a dedicated carnival avenue, a Bikini Arch symbol, and a city carnival warehouse where the top schools can work all year round on their gigantic cars?”⁷³ It was Brazil’s leading modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer, who, commissioned by the government, designed both the modernist capital Brasília and, in 1984, the *sambódromo*; with the

Bikini arch that towers over Apotheosis Square, he paid homage to the bikini-clad women of Carioca beaches.⁷⁴ The State and its capitalist allies – most prominently, the media conglomerate Globo TV – regulate the samba spectacle to perpetuate the national myth of racial democracy. But the people – *o povo* (a term ubiquitous in samba songs) have repeatedly invoked the myth to generate *alegria* as a democratic right. We hear it as early as “vem cá, mulata” (come here, mulata), a *samba de enredo* from 1906: “o povo gosta da nossa dança” (the people love our dance). Not accidentally does the mulata of the song’s title declare, “sou democrata do curacao” (I’m a democrat at heart).⁷⁵

CONCLUSION: THE POLITICS OF BACCHANAL

“Samba is happiness. To perform samba, regardless of whether it is fast or slow, marched or not, played on expensive instruments or plastic buckets, one needs to be happy. This is because happiness is embodied in samba.”⁷⁶ Although his research context was not Carnival samba but the samba performances connected with devotional practices in northeastern Brazil, Michael Iyanaga’s ethnographical study of samba’s ability to perform, create, and augment collective happiness powerfully confirms the connections between samba, happiness, and postcolonial subject-formation that I have advanced in this essay.⁷⁷ “Eu quero mais é ser feliz” (I want most of all to be happy),



Figure 1.1 Rio de Janeiro, *Sambódromo*, 2nd March 2014.
Source and Permission: Author, Ananya Jahanara Kabir.

declares the chorus of the 2014 *samba de enredo* “Favela” performed by the school São Clemente. Taking a cue from my immersion during an evening of Carnival fervor in Rio de Janeiro, when I, together, with nearly a 100,000 people, performed, declared, and realized that which we wanted most – to be happy – I have offered a prolegomena to the problems and possibilities of postcolonial happiness. The songs that are sung, the rhythms that are played and danced to, and the narratives that are referenced re-enact what Diana Taylor has called “foundational scenarios” within performances of cultural memory in the Americas.⁷⁸ While Taylor has demonstrated how these scenarios commemorate the mestizo/a as an embodiment of racial violence, I would go a step further and asseverate that the Rio Carnival is a postcolonial social pact that returns to those scenarios through the happiness of the samba. This national spectacle of Dionysian proportions provokes and channels flow to provide secular modernity with a postcolonial version of Carnival as premodern ritual.⁷⁹ The consequent paradigm of collective pleasure enacts an erotohistoriography not of the couple but of the collective – the “bacchanal,” to adopt for a moment the Trinidadian patois term for a party.⁸⁰

The example of Brazil, with a history, language, and temporality of (post)colonization very different from the paradigms and exemplars that have come to signify the “postcolonial,” serves to defamiliarize those of us perhaps a bit too accustomed to that received reading of the postcolonial to be able to generate from established terrain new points of theoretical and philosophical departure, such as the move from trauma to *alegria* that I had called for in the introduction.⁸¹ Embodied and collective forms of pleasure not only bring to the work of analysis affective modes other than melancholia of all shades and political depression; they remind us that happiness, play, and exhilaration can be deeply political forces for radical change. Celebrating happiness as a resource for post-traumatic survival is the first step towards understanding the work the performance of happiness does in a seemingly broken world.

ENDNOTES

1. Mangueira samba school, “Samba de enredo,” 2014. All translations from the Portuguese are mine.
2. Since January 2013, I have conducted three fieldwork visits to Brazil, funded by research monies from the University of Leeds, a British Academy Small Research Grant, and, most recently, a European Research Council Advanced Research Grant. The material for this essay was gathered during the ERC-funded visit. I am deeply grateful to my friends from São Paulo for their company and knowledge: Paola Cepeda Andrade, Cris Duarte, and, most of all, Regiane Ramos. Thanks also to Beatriz Eugenio Mayo, Dimitri Lopes, Leonardo Guerra, and Diego Gonzales. Obrigada Sofia Martinho for superb Portuguese tuition. An initial version of this essay was delivered as a lecture to The Centre for Contemporary Studies, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. Thanks to Raghavendra Gadadkar and Amrita Shah for facilitating it, and to Achal Prabhala and James Tiburcio for feedback. All translations from the Portuguese are mine.
3. Brazil achieved independence from the Portuguese Empire in 1822. This was a very early moment of decolonization even within the Lusophone world, with African colonies of Portugal generally achieving independence in the 1970s. This extended timeline makes the Portuguese postcolonial experience, stretched over c. 150 years, very different from experiences in the Anglophone world. Brazil’s existence as a postcolonial nation from the time when Britain was, for instance, consolidating its imperial presence in India, and

- the fact that its cultural affair are conducted in Portuguese, contributes to the erasure of Brazil from a horizon of scholarship on the “postcolonial” that is often narrowly Anglophone and South-Asia-centric in orientation. For a critique and the possibility of new approaches to a Brazil–South Asia postcolonial dialogue, see Ananya Chakravarti, “Peripheral Eyes: Brazilians and India, 1947–1961.” *Journal of Global History* 10.1 (March 2015): 122–146. On Brazil and the postcolonial, see Francisco Ortega Martinez, “Postcolonialism and Latin American writing, 1492–1850.” In *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 288–308.
4. The relationship between postcolonial studies, melancholia, and trauma is explained in detail in the first section of this chapter, “The enchantment of melancholia,” below.
 5. Tom Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes, “A Felicidade” (Rio de Janeiro: Augustinho dos Santos, 1959).
 6. These are critiques and new questions directed towards myself as much as everyone else involved in the scholarly reproduction of postcolonial melancholia. For my first attempt to move beyond that frame, see Ananya Jahanara Kabir, “Affect, Body, Place.” In *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Gert Beulens, Samuel Durrant and Robert Eaglestone (London: Routledge, 2014), 63–77.
 7. Most evidently, Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2012). See also Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
 8. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994). See in particular his comments on mimicry and mimic men in “Sly Civility,” *ibid.*, pp. 132–144.
 9. Ato Quayson, *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice, or Process?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).
 10. Carrie Hamilton, “Happy Memories.” *New Formations* 63.1 (2007): 65.
 11. For an early example of this, see Ananya Jahanara Kabir, “Subjectivities, Memories, Loss: Of Pigskin Bags, Silver Spittoons and the Partition of India.” *Interventions* 4.2 (2002): 245–264.
 12. See here Arend Lijphart, *The Trauma of Decolonization: The Dutch and West New Guinea* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966); Landeg White, “Empire’s Revenge.” *Index on Censorship* 28.1 (1999): 50–55. For examples from South Asia, see nn. 14–15 below.
 13. This convergence is discussed by Srila Roy, “Melancholic Politics and the Politics of Melancholia: The Indian Women’s Movement.” *Feminist Theory* 10.3 (2009): 341–357; which, *inter alia*, also provides a thoughtful inquiry into Indian feminism’s melancholic preoccupation with an earlier historical period of activism.
 14. Ritu Menon, *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition* (Rochester: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).
 15. Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).
 16. See Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Partition’s Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia* (Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2013); Deepti Misri, *Beyond Partition: Violence, Gender, and Representation in Postcolonial India* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014); and Srila Roy, *Remembering Revolution: Gender, Violence, and Subjectivity in India’s Naxalbari Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
 17. Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Gert Beulens, Samuel Durrant, and Robert Eaglestone, eds., *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2013).

18. For the movement towards vernacular affective vocabulary, see Nukhbah Taj Langah, *Poetry as Resistance: Islam and Ethnicity in Postcolonial Pakistan* (New Delhi: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012); Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Kabir, *Partition's Post-Amnesias* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2014).
19. Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
20. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Vintage, 1995; first published 1981), Chapter 4, "Brushed under the Carpet."
21. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 2.
22. *Ibid.*, 18.
23. *Ibid.*, 222.
24. *Ibid.*, 222.
25. See Darrin M. McMahon, "From the Happiness of Virtue to the Virtue of Happiness: 400 BC–AD 1780." *Daedalus* 133.2 (2004): 5–17; this entire issue of *Daedalus* contains several other essays considering happiness from diverse philosophical angles.
26. Ahmed, *Promise*, 4–12.
27. Heather Love, "Compulsory Happiness and Queer Existence." *New Formations* 63.1 (2007): 53–54; see also Ahmed, *Promise*, 7.
28. Love, "Compulsory Happiness," 54 and 63.
29. Lauren Berlant, "Cruel Optimism: On Marx, Loss and the Senses." *New Formations* 63.1 (2007): 33–51.
30. *Ibid.*, 35.
31. Elizabeth Freeman, "Time Binds, or Erotohistoriography." *Social Text* 23.3–4 (2005): 57–68, at 59.
32. Love, "Compulsory Happiness," 53; Ahmed, *Promise*, 6.
33. See Richard Schoch, *The Secrets of Happiness: Three Thousand Years of Searching for the Good Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 20–45, for a review of this tradition.
34. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997).
35. Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).
36. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23.
37. *Ibid.*, 23.
38. Love, "Compulsory Happiness," 63.
39. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (London: Macmillan, 2007), 13.
40. Love, "Compulsory Happiness," 63.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 94.
43. *Ibid.*, 95.
44. Karl Marx, "Economic and Political Transcripts." In *Early Writings*, ed. Rodney Livingstone. Trans. Gregor Benton (New York: Vintage, 1975; first published 1844), 162.
45. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
46. Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (London: Polity, 2006), 230.
47. Amartya Sen, "Human Rights and Capabilities." *Journal of Human Development* 6.2 (2005): 151–166; Martha Nussbaum, "Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice." *Feminist Economics* 9.2–3 (2003): 33–59.
48. Julian Go, "A Globalizing Constitutionalism? Views from the Postcolony, 1945–2000." *International Sociology* 18.1 (2003): 71–95.

49. Hamilton, "Happy Memories."
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Yolanda Pierce, "Her Refusal to be Recast(e): Annie Burton's Narrative of Resistance." *The Southern Library Journal* 34.2 (2004): 12, n.1.
54. Freeman, "Time Binds," 59.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.; Khanna, *Dark Continents*; Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
57. For a full account of this structure and organization, see Frederick J. Moehn, "'The Disc Is Not the Avenue': Schismogenetic Mimesis in Samba Recording." In *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, ed. Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 47–83.
58. Ibid., explicates in detail these temporal entanglements.
59. Saurabh Dube, *Stitches on Time: Colonial Textures and Postcolonial Tangles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
60. Chris McGowan and Ricardo Pessanha, *The Brazilian Sound: Samba, Bossa Nova, and the Popular Music of Brazil* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 58.
61. Freeman, "Time Binds," 59.
62. Ibid.
63. See Gilberto Freyre's classic tome, *Casa-grande e senzala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986; first published 1933), where these discursive elements are already fully present.
64. The following discussion summarizes the tropes, images, and themes used in the lyrics of 2014's *sambas de enredo*, and in the paratexts (both aural and textual) surrounding their transmission in print and sound: on the one hand, the introductory comments we hear before each song in the "official" CD, *Sambas de Enredo 2014* (Universal Music Ltda, 2014), and on the other, in the introductory comments we read before each song's lyrics, are presented in the free booklets distributed to the *sambódromo*'s visitors: *Rio, Samba e Carnaval* (Rio de Janeiro: RSC Ltda, 2014). All quotes in the subsequent paragraphs are taken from the samba lyrics presented in this booklet.
65. On the meaning of the *surdo*'s deep sound, see Frederick Moehn, *Contemporary Carioca: Technologies of Mixing in a Brazilian Music Scene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 100–102.
66. Homi Bhabha, "How Newness Enters the World." *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 212–235. The question was first asked by Salman Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses: A Novel* (New York: Random House, 2011), 8.
67. Tom Jobim, *Terra Brasilis* (Los Angeles: Warner Bros, 1980). See also Edivaldo José Borroto, "The Land Brasilis: The Paradise of the God (s) and (in) Credulous People or the Place Where 'there is no sin below the equator'." *Impulso* 27 (n.d.), accessed February 12, 2015. <http://www.unimep.br/phpg/editora/revistaspdf/imp27arto6.pdf>
68. Clarence Bernard Henry, *Let's Make Some Noise: Axé and the African Roots of Brazilian Popular Music* (Missouri: University of Mississippi Press, 2010).
69. Erica Lorraine Williams, *Sex Tourism in Bahia: Ambiguous Entanglements* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013).
70. Hamilton, "Happy Memories," 70–71.
71. Julia Mourri, "A Rio, les défilés du carnaval sont les marqueurs d'une ville divisée." *Le Monde*, March 3, 2014, accessed February 12, 2015. <http://mondeacinter.blog.lemonde.fr/2014/03/03/a-rio-les-defiles-du-carnaval-sont-les-marqueurs-dune-ville-divisee/>
72. Diego Gonzales, Facebook Communication, March 4, 2014.

73. Ibid.
74. David Underwood, "Popular Culture and High Art in the Work of Oscar Niemeyer." *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 16.65 (1994): 139; Styliane Philippou, *Oscar Niemeyer: Curves of Irreverence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).
75. "Vem cá mulata," Carnival hit of 1906. As is the norm with popular Brazilian songs, several interpretations of it exist. The earliest recorded version is accessible on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOgyAy4W8To>. There is a pun, I believe, on the mulata's assertion that she is a "democrat at heart": the song was the carnival song of the early samba school Os Democratos ("the democrats"), and the woman would seem to be asserting her affiliation to this club by refusing the invitation to dance issuing from a member of, it would seem, a rival school. Given the song's focus on Carnival's ability to generate collective joy that moves incrementally from the dancing couple to the crowd (*o povo*), it asks also to be read as a comment on the radical, inclusive politics of Carnival happiness. See also Antonio Herculano Lopes, "Vem cá, Mulata!" *Tempo* 13.26 (2009), accessed February 12, 2015. http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S1413-77042009000100005&script=sci_arttext
76. Michael Iyanaga, *New World Songs for Catholic Saints: Domestic Performances of Devotion and History in Bahia, Brazil*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles. 2013, 293.
77. Ibid., 295–296.
78. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 55–58.
79. Csíkszentmihályi misses a trick when he considers the social potency of premodern, sacred rituals spawned by "previous models of cosmic order" as lost to secular modernity, for he seems to have forgotten the nation's ability to generate popular, flow-creating rituals in the name of patriotic pageantry (Flow, 77). Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets*, 9–12, very usefully discusses the Enlightenment's loss of interest in, and colonialism's concurrent demonizing of, rituals of collective ecstasy, and notes their harnessing by Facism (ibid., 180–181). Suggestively enough, she concludes her book's call for a renewal of collective ecstasy with a description of the Rio Carnival's streetwide manifestations (ibid., 260–261).
80. On bacchanal in the Trinidadian context, see Milla Cozart Riggio, ed. *Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Daniel Miller, "Absolute Freedom in Trinidad." *Man* 26 (1991): 323–341; and Peter Mason, "*Bacchanal*": *The Carnival Culture of Trinidad* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers 1998).
81. On Brazil and the postcolonial, see note 3.

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CHAPTER TWO

ON NOT CLOSING THE LOOP

Empathy, ethics, and transcultural witnessing

—♦—
Stef Craps

In a 2012 essay in the online magazine *Guernica* titled “The Storytellers of Empire,” adapted from a speech delivered at Yale University in September 2011, the Pakistani novelist Kamila Shamsie deplores the inward-looking nature of much American fiction published during the first decade of the twenty-first century. She sees it as symptomatic of a closed empathy loop. “Your soldiers will come to our lands,” Shamsie tells her American audience, “but your novelists won’t.”¹ She quotes from an interview with John Freeman, the editor of *Granta*, about the magazine’s “Ten Years Later” issue, which explores how we look back at 9/11:

We read less about the world and more about ourselves – instead of reading about the places we are invading, we read about our invaders. . . . It’s a natural instinct, I suppose, but in terms of empathy it feels like a closed loop.²

She holds up John Hersey, an American writer from an earlier generation best known for his account of the aftermath of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, as a shining example of a writer who “never closed the loop” and who, moreover, “wanted to be part of a project which helped Americans imagine and aspire for an America which never closed the loop.”³

Shamsie can readily name a number of American nonfiction writers from the last decade who have followed in Hersey’s footsteps in terms of outward-lookingness, including Jon Lee Anderson, Sarah Chayes, Ann Jones, David Finkel, and Steve Coll. “In nonfiction,” Shamsie writes,

the 9/11 genre takes in Iraq and Afghanistan and Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, it discusses Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib, it reaches back to the 1980s and the U.S. involvement in the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, it looks at the Patriot Act and drone attacks.⁴

However, she does not see any successors to Hersey in the realm of American *fiction*:

In fiction, with pitifully few exceptions, the 9/11 novel looks at 9/11 the day itself, in New York – think of the most acclaimed novels in that genre: Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*, Claire Messud’s *The Emperor’s Children* or Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*.⁵

She complains that, rather than entwining the story of the day itself with other stories, American novelists tend to treat 9/11 as if it were a natural disaster that came out of nowhere without warning: “in American fiction, 9/11 is a traumatic event as ahistorical as an earthquake.”⁶ There are no intimations of America’s dominant role in the world, its twentieth-century “empire,” or of the long sweep of colonial and postcolonial history that has shaped the Middle East, the region from where the attacks emanated.

Shamsie attributes the lack of concern with the role of America in the world that she sees among the American fiction writers of her generation partly to fear of appropriation of other people’s stories. This is something that, she suspects, weighs down those writers more than writers of earlier generations. She recognizes that “writers implicated in certain power structures have been guilty of writing fiction which supports, justifies and props up those power structures.”⁷ She is also sympathetic to “the concerns of people who feel that for too long stories have been told about them rather than by them.”⁸ However, fear of appropriation is not a sufficient excuse, in Shamsie’s view, for abstaining from engagement with the wider world altogether. The proper response, she feels, is for writers “to write differently, to write better, to critique the power structures rather than propping them up, to move beyond stereotype . . .”⁹ She ends her essay by voicing her suspicion that the more fundamental problem is a lack of empathy with the rest of the world: “you just don’t care very much about us.”¹⁰

I began this chapter with a brief summary of Shamsie’s essay because her identification of an empathy deficit at the heart of contemporary American literature and the possible explanations and solutions she offers are directly relevant to the topic I want to address here, namely the challenges that witnessing distant suffering poses for empathic understanding and ethical thinking. To underline the depth and tenacity of the problem, I will first show that an increased awareness of the perils of representing distant suffering has not prevented even the scholarly field that has arguably done most to highlight these perils – trauma theory – from falling victim to them. Next, I will analyze the work of a prominent contemporary American writer whom Shamsie fails to mention yet who, to my mind, successfully navigates the challenges she identifies and who can with some justification be considered the successor to John Hersey that Shamsie is looking for but fails to discover: a John Hersey for our age, as it were. Widely recognized as one of the finest authors writing in America today, Dave Eggers shot to fame in 2000 with his best-selling memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*.¹¹ In this chapter, though, I am going to focus on his novel *What Is the What*, the fictionalized autobiography of a Sudanese “Lost Boy” that he published in 2006.¹² Reading this collaborative testimony as an inspiring example of genuine and effective cross-cultural ethical engagement, I suggest that contemporary

American literature is more outward-looking than Shamsie gives it credit for and holds out hope that our “colonial present” – to use Derek Gregory’s phrase¹³ – can and will be transformed into a decolonial future.

THE PERILS OF REPRESENTING DISTANT SUFFERING

Over the last few decades, creative artists as well as humanities scholars – producers and students of cultural artifacts – have become increasingly aware of the perils and pitfalls involved in the representation of “the other,” whether understood in cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, or class terms. This development can be accounted for at least in part by the rise of various social movements and their academic counterparts, especially postcolonial studies and gender studies. Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Mary Ellmann, and Kate Millet – to give just a few examples – have famously criticized stereotypical representations of the respective constituencies whose cause they champion (non-Westerners and women) and exposed the appropriative impulses that may inform even seemingly benign attempts to represent or speak for disempowered or subaltern groups.¹⁴ However, the specific question of empathy with distant others, which Shamsie’s essay is centrally concerned with, has arguably been debated most intensely by scholars active in another area of cultural investigation, one I will discuss at greater length.

A desire to promote cross-cultural empathy and ethical engagement underlies much cultural research on trauma, testimony, and witnessing that has been done since the early 1990s under the rubric of trauma theory. A product of the so-called ethical turn affecting the humanities, trauma theory promised to infuse the study of literary and cultural texts with new relevance. Amid accusations that literary scholarship, particularly in its deconstructive, poststructuralist, or textualist guise, had become indifferent or oblivious to “what goes on in the real world” (the world outside the text: history, politics, ethics), trauma theory confidently announced itself as an essential apparatus for understanding “the real world” and even as a potential means for changing it for the better.

This epistemological and ethical programme is clearly laid out in the highly influential work of Cathy Caruth, one of the founding figures of trauma theory (along with Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Geoffrey Hartman, and Dominick LaCapra). In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, she argues that a textualist approach – one which insists that all reference is indirect – need not lead us away from history and into “political and ethical paralysis.”¹⁵ Quite the contrary, in fact: conjoining a psychoanalytic view of trauma with a deconstructive vigilance regarding the indeterminacies of representation in the analysis of texts that bear witness to traumatic histories can grant us a paradoxical mode of access to extreme events and experiences that defy understanding and representation.

Moreover, this critical practice comes invested with ethical significance. Caruth claims that the “new mode of reading and of listening”¹⁶ that trauma demands can help break the isolation imposed on both individuals and cultures by traumatic experience: “history, like trauma, is never simply one’s own, . . . history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas.”¹⁷ In a catastrophic age such as ours,

she writes elsewhere, “trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures.”¹⁸ With trauma forming a bridge between disparate historical experiences, so the argument goes, listening to the trauma of another can foster empathy and thereby contribute to cross-cultural solidarity and to the creation of new forms of community.

It should be noted that the kind of empathic response favored by Caruth and other trauma scholars is to be distinguished from common understandings of empathy as a straightforward form of identification, such as can be found in the work of Martha Nussbaum, Wayne Booth, Richard Rorty, and other exponents of the neo-humanist school of literary-ethical inquiry.¹⁹ As a sub-strand of what one might see as the competing deconstructive school represented by Jacques Derrida, J. Hillis Miller, Derek Attridge, and others,²⁰ trauma theory indicts neo-humanist complacency. It rejects what Caruth calls “facile empathy” and the “rush to comprehension”²¹ associated with the neo-humanist call for imaginative participation in the lives of others. Rather than assimilate the other to the same, trauma theory emphasizes the need to respect the otherness of the other, which eludes every attempt to understand, grasp, or possess it. Instead of naively believing in the power of the sympathetic imagination to understand what the other has suffered, it puts into question the imperialism of the same (to use another Levinasian term) which insists on reducing the other to the self’s horizons of significance. According to trauma theory, then, the expansion of the circle of moral inclusion, the circle of the “we,” can actually end up doing violence to the distant others whose inclusion is sought.

Trauma and memory scholars such as Caruth, LaCapra, Jill Bennett, E. Ann Kaplan, and Alison Landsberg are careful to distinguish empathy from forms of affective involvement that do not recognize and respect alterity, and which are variously referred to as sympathy (Landsberg); projective or incorporative identification (LaCapra); surrogate victimage (LaCapra); and facile, empty, or crude empathy (Caruth; Kaplan; Bennett). Desirable empathy, by contrast, is called, simply, empathy (LaCapra; Landsberg), empathic unsettlement (LaCapra), critical empathy (Bennett), or ethical witnessing (Kaplan).²² This caveat against imperialism and appropriation is meant to prevent empathy from turning into a closed-loop process.

From its inception, though, trauma theory itself has been plagued by Eurocentric and monocultural tendencies, which sit uneasily with and, ironically, even counteract the field’s commitment to cross-cultural ethical engagement.²³ In an article on the exclusions and limitations of trauma theory, Susannah Radstone notes that there are limits to the empathy advocated by trauma theory:

it is the sufferings of those, categorized in the West as “other”, that tend *not* to be addressed via trauma theory – which becomes in this regard, a theory that supports politicized constructions of those with whom identifications via traumatic sufferings can be forged and those from whom such identifications are withheld.²⁴

Judith Butler spells out the far-reaching consequences of such constructions in *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, where she argues that the differential distribution of precarity across populations is “at once a material and a perceptual issue”: “those whose lives are not ‘regarded’ as potentially grievable, and hence valuable, are made

to bear the burden of starvation, underemployment, legal disenfranchisement, and differential exposure to violence and death.”²⁵ A one-sided focus on traumas suffered by members of Western cultural traditions – such as the Holocaust and 9/11 – could thus have pernicious effects at odds with trauma theory’s self-proclaimed ethical mission. If trauma theory is to adhere to its ethical aspirations, it must keep the empathy loop open: the empathy it promotes must extend to the sufferings of those belonging to non-Western or minority groups.

However, in those relatively rare cases when canonical trauma theory does move beyond its traditional Euro-American focus and attempts to reach out to non-Western others, it often exhibits the very imperialistic and exploitative behavior it condemns. Take, for example, the few descriptions of cross-cultural encounters that we are offered in Caruth’s pioneering study *Unclaimed Experience*. I am thinking of her reading of the story of Tancred and Clorinda, her analysis of Sigmund Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism*, and her interpretation of the film *Hiroshima mon amour*, all of which are central to her formulation of trauma theory, yet which strike me as highly problematic instances of witnessing across cultural boundaries. What tends to happen there is that empathy is surreptitiously redirected toward the European character, and the non-European other ends up being silenced, excluded from the empathy loop, his or her suffering ignored or relegated to the margins of a Western trauma drama. Rather than being evidence of a postcolonial sensibility, then, Caruth’s descriptions of cross-cultural encounters actually reinforce Eurocentrism.²⁶

As such, they seem to bear out the suspicion voiced by Radstone, in her article “Theory and Affect: Undivided Worlds,” that trauma theory, despite its stated concern with the empathic witnessing of the pain of others and its explicit aim of redeeming their suffering, “is driven, at an unconscious level, by a certain aggressivity”:²⁷ “Trauma theory is a consequence both of acts of violence and aggression that it seeks to redeem, and of unconscious aggressivity that it unconsciously vents.”²⁸ In fact, Radstone believes that the popularity of trauma theory “cannot be understood without reference to both these aspects of the theory.”²⁹ Her suggestion that the appeal of trauma theory derives in part from its simultaneous disavowal of and address to the aggressive drives of readers and practitioners aligns her with Mark Seltzer’s analysis of what he calls our contemporary “wound culture,” by which he means “the public fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound.”³⁰ Seltzer characterizes the public sphere that is defined by this wound culture as a “pathological public sphere,” that is, one in which “the very notion of sociality is bound to the excitations of the torn and opened body, the torn and exposed individual, as public spectacle.”³¹ According to him, this pathological public sphere is inhabited by voyeurs and fetishists. Witnessing the suffering of others has little to do with compassion, in his view – quite the contrary, even: the cultural fixation on spectacles of suffering and trauma (such as car crashes or serial killings) is all about individuals indulging in erotic pleasure, enjoying a sadistic identification with violence and a masochistic identification with exposed pain. Radstone’s and Seltzer’s accounts of the darker aspects of “empathy” and the selfish fascinations that partly shape the impetus to engage with trauma seem highly pertinent in the context of transcultural witnessing.

Serious misgivings about the political efficacy of empathy have also been voiced by Lauren Berlant and Wendy Brown, who, in separate critiques, deplore “the steady

slide of political into therapeutic discourse”³² that, in their view, the application of notions of trauma to situations of social injustice and the resulting tendency to “over-identif[y] the eradication of pain with the achievement of justice”³³ abet. In the same vein, Rosanne Kennedy and Tikka Jan Wilson argue that, insofar as it encourages readers of testimonies to identify with innocent victims, trauma theory absolves the former of the need to engage in critical self-reflection regarding their own possible complicity in oppressive practices, whether as active participants, bystanders, or beneficiaries. Kennedy and Wilson warn that, with empathy functioning as a substitute for critical thinking and effective political action, trauma theory and the testimonies it studies may end up depoliticizing the histories that have produced the wound to which they bear empathetic witness.³⁴

KEEPING THE EMPATHY LOOP OPEN

Given the myriad hurdles and obstacles involved in empathetically engaging with distant others, which even trauma theory itself cannot seem to surmount, it would come as no surprise if contemporary American literature had indeed turned inward, as Shamsie claims. After all, writers would be fools to expose themselves to the barrage of criticism and skepticism that, it appears, inevitably meets any effort to reach out to the racial, ethnic, or cultural other these days. One only has to consider the way in which the *Kony 2012* campaign, which sought to instill empathy for the victims of an African warlord in an American (and, beyond that, a global) audience, was almost universally derided by the intellectual establishment to realize the extent to which academic concerns about appropriation, exploitation, and imperialism have entered the cultural mainstream.³⁵ However, in the final part of this chapter, I will argue that contemporary American literature is not, in fact, the empathy-starved wasteland Shamsie makes it out to be.

While her negative assessment of the current state of American letters is shared by Bruce Robbins, who diagnoses twenty-first-century American fiction as suffering from a lack of “worldliness,”³⁶ others beg to differ. Meghan O’Rourke, one of the judges chosen to select the best young American novelists for *Granta* in 2007, remarked at the time:

I was struck by the degree to which American writers are looking outward . . . there’s a sense now that to be an American fiction writer is to deal with America in the world – and the world in America. If in the past American fiction dealt with the rest of the globe by trying hard to assimilate it, today it deals with it by going outward towards it.³⁷

O’Rourke’s statement, made in the same journal whose editor Shamsie quotes in support of her rather different view, is echoed by Aliko Varvogli in her monograph *Travel and Dislocation in Contemporary American Fiction*, which analyzes a range of novels that “go outward,” in the sense that their protagonists either go abroad or carry within them a sense of being abroad.³⁸ Varvogli’s study gives pride of place to the work of Dave Eggers, curiously overlooked by Shamsie, which strikes me as an instructive example of how American literature can shake off its alleged insularity

and engage with the rest of the world in a responsible and productive manner. In what follows, I will focus on Eggers's novel *What Is the What*, and suggest that in this book the author manages both to stay true to the continuing cultural demand for empathy with distant others and to defuse or counter the prevailing "skepticism about the morality of empathic identification"³⁹ that tends to find such efforts hopelessly wanting.

Published by McSweeney's in 2006, *What Is the What*, subtitled *The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng*, tells the story of a refugee from the Second Sudanese Civil War. One of the thousands of "Lost Boys" who were brutally displaced during the conflict, Deng was forced to leave his village in southern Sudan at the age of six and walked hundreds of miles, pursued by militias, government bombers, and wild animals, to find safety, settling in camps in Ethiopia and later Kenya, and finally moving to Atlanta, Georgia. Wanting to reach out to a wide audience by telling the story of his life in a book, he came into contact with Eggers, with whom he collaborated over a period of several years to create *What Is the What*.

The book did not come together until Eggers, having first tried but failed to write Deng's life story as an oral history by transcribing their numerous interviews, decided to turn it into a first-person fiction. Acutely aware of the overtones of a privileged white American writing the fictionalized autobiography of a struggling black African, Eggers took great pains to be as transparent as possible about the genesis and development of the project.

The book's generic hybridity is clear from the start, as the title page, which identifies Eggers as the sole author, refers to Deng's story as both an autobiography and a novel. The book contains a preface signed by Deng, which explains the book's peculiar generic status and outlines its social agenda:

This book was born out of the desire on the part of myself and the author to reach out to others and help them understand the atrocities many successive governments of Sudan committed before and during the civil war. To that end, over the course of many years, I told my story orally to the author. He then concocted this novel, approximating my own voice and using the basic events of my life as the foundation. Because many of the passages are fictional, the result is called a novel. . . . And though it is fictionalized, it should be noted that the world I have known is not so different from the one depicted within these pages. We live in a time when even the most horrific events in this book could occur, and in most cases did occur.⁴⁰

In the revised preface to the 2007 Random House edition, Deng further explains his and Eggers's reasons for resorting to fictionalization – they had to pronounce the book a novel, he says, because of the fallibility of Deng's memory – yet assures the reader that "most of the major events in the book are true"; indeed, "[t]he book is historically accurate."⁴¹ This assertion reverses the traditional hierarchy of the nineteenth-century African American slave narrative, where, as Varvogli points out, "the stamp of authenticity was placed on the book's preface by a white person who could also vouch for the slave's honesty and integrity."⁴² Any semblance of paternalism or imbalanced power relations is further dispelled by Deng's disclosure, in the revised though not in the original preface, of the financial arrangement he had made with Eggers: they

agreed, he writes, that “all of the author’s proceeds from the book would be mine and would be used to improve the lives of Sudanese in Sudan and elsewhere.”⁴³

Moreover, *What Is the What* contests the notion that the United States is morally superior to Sudan by juxtaposing the story of Deng’s perilous African journey with an account of his ongoing persecution within the United States: indeed, Deng’s adopted country is depicted not as a haven but as another war zone, where he faces yet more violence and discrimination. This implicit critique of American exceptionalism is continued in *Zeitoun*, a more recent collaboratively produced testimonial narrative about the unjust treatment of a Syrian American Muslim in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in which Eggers describes the United States as a site of moral decay in contrast with Syria.⁴⁴ (In light of recent events, of course, Eggers’s benign portrayal of the latter country looks a little dated now.) Similarly, *Voice of Witness*, a non-profit oral history book series that was started in the wake of Eggers’s encounter with Deng under the former’s co-editorship, has published volumes on human-rights crises around the world, both outside and within the United States.⁴⁵

In a feature published in *The Guardian* around the time *What Is the What* came out, Eggers spoke of his desire to “disappear completely” behind Deng’s voice,⁴⁶ and an article in *Entertainment Weekly* quoted him as asking the friends to whom he had shown a draft of the manuscript to “edit it as brutally as possible to make sure that *nothing*, not even one adjective choice, sounded like me.”⁴⁷ However, in a rare hostile review of *What Is the What*, Lee Siegel accused Eggers of failing spectacularly in this regard. Regretting that Eggers had not refrained from fictionalizing and simply given his reader “[t]he unadorned story, the true story humbly recorded and presented,” he claims that in the book as we know it “Deng’s personhood has been displaced by someone else’s style and sensibility – by someone else’s story. Deng survived his would-be killers in the Sudan, only to have his identity erased here.”⁴⁸ According to Siegel, Deng “does not really exist”⁴⁹ in *What Is the What*, because “Eggers’s voice is all over the book . . . Eggers has totally subsumed his Sudanese hero’s voice into his own.”⁵⁰ Pointing out similarities between particular passages from *What Is the What* and Eggers’s breakthrough memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, Siegel calls the former book’s “innocent expropriation of another man’s identity” “a post-colonial arrogance.”⁵¹

It seems to me, though, that Siegel misses the point of Eggers’s attempt at self-erasure. As one would expect from the hyper-self-reflexive author of *Staggering Genius*, Eggers makes visible the process and limitations of the act of authorial self-annihilation in performing it.⁵² The voice we hear in the book is “both hybrid and singular, distinctly audible and yet impossible to locate” – Elizabeth Twitchell calls it a “third voice” that is neither quite Deng’s nor quite Eggers’s;⁵³ let us call it Valentino’s. This device allows the author to retain Deng’s autonomy and to intercede in the reader’s attempts at identification, which can never be complete. According to Twitchell, “The novel thus proposes a unique relationship among author, reader, and subject, one that enables fellow feeling while disabling projection – or worse, the vampiric appropriation of the traumatized subject.”⁵⁴

What Is the What actively tries to forge empathetic bonds and create cosmopolitan communities through the device of imaginary conversations between the narrator and various people he meets. In the preface, Deng confidently states: “Since you [the reader] and I exist, together we can make a difference!”⁵⁵ However, this model of

collaboration remains a wish rather than a reality for much of the novel: Valentino silently tells the story of his life to a whole series of interlocutors, none of whom is prepared to listen to what he has to say. These “silent stories”⁵⁶ culminate in another direct appeal to the reader at the very end of the narrative, where Valentino, like Deng in the preface, asserts his existence. Throughout the narrative the reader has been “an undetected eavesdropper,”⁵⁷ but in the final paragraph Valentino acknowledges the presence of the reader and the author:

Whatever I do, however I find a way to live, I will tell these stories. . . . [T]o do anything else would be something less than human. I speak to these people, and I speak to you because I cannot help it. It gives me strength, almost unbelievable strength, to know that you are there. I covet your eyes, your ears, the collapsible space between us. . . . I am alive and you are alive so we must fill the air with our words. . . . How can I pretend that you do not exist? It would be almost as impossible as you pretending that I do not exist.⁵⁸

The reader is called upon to corroborate Valentino’s existence, yet he or she knows full well that Valentino is a construct, a product of literary ventriloquism. In fact, Eggers’s mediating role is underlined in this excerpt by a fairly explicit allusion to an intertext that one cannot fail to be reminded of while reading *What Is the What*: Ralph Ellison’s famous 1952 novel *Invisible Man*. Ellison’s protagonist is an unnamed African American man who has been rendered socially invisible by racism (“I am an invisible man. . . . I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me”⁵⁹), a predicament that clearly resonates with that of Valentino, who is largely ignored by the Americans around him. Thus, the very passage in which Valentino asserts his independent existence and urges the reader and the author to acknowledge this reminds us of the inevitability of mediation and the ever-present risk of discursive imperialism.

This is a risk, however, that Deng and Eggers are willing to take. Deng rejects the isolationism of Ellison’s protagonist, who locks himself up in an abandoned basement in a desperate attempt to maintain autonomy. Deng wants to make the reader aware of injustice and appeals to him or her to act in collaboration with him to “make a difference.” In marked contrast with *Kony 2012*-type humanitarian campaigns, which portray Africans as helpless victims whose only hope lies in the actions of white saviors, Eggers’s novel seeks to create bonds of solidarity and community between equally empowered distant strangers.⁶⁰ The interlocutors whom Valentino silently addresses and the readers who engage with his narrative are called upon to join him in a collective project of social justice. This communitarian vision informs a novel that does not resolve all the moral ambiguities surrounding transcultural witnessing but that is unafraid to confront them and refuses to be paralyzed by them. To quote Twitchell once more:

Rather than throw his hands up in despair, citing the hopelessness of communicating trauma or the inevitability of linguistic imperialism, Eggers writes helplessness, uncertainty, and the likelihood of empathic error into *What Is the What*. He concedes the limitations of the project, but he publishes the book.⁶¹

I want to suggest, in closing, that *What Is the What* is a good example not only of the new ways of writing that Shamsie calls on American fiction writers to develop, but perhaps also of the “middle voice” which Rick Crownshaw has argued memory studies is in dire need of. In his introduction to the essay collection *The Future of Memory*, published in 2010, Crownshaw writes: “In sum, the future of memory studies might be wise to draw on LaCapra’s concept of the middle voice, which generates a sense of ‘empathic unsettlement’ in relation to (rather than over-identification with) past victims.”⁶² The middle voice originally refers to a grammatical category found in certain languages which occupies a place in the middle between the active and passive voices, because the subject cannot be categorized as either agent or patient. However, Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra, taking their cue from an essay by Roland Barthes, use it to designate what they take to be an appropriate way to write about extreme traumatic events such as the Holocaust.⁶³ Exactly how we should picture the discursive analogue to the middle voice that they have in mind remains unclear, though. Crownshaw writes:

What then does the middle voice sound like or, when transcribed, look like, and just how is it articulated? LaCapra does not suggest that there is a stylistic formula but that an adequate voice (or form of historical representation) illuminates one’s pre-existing implication in transferential relations. It is the aporetic nature of the middle voice that opens up a space in which the addressers’ and addressees’, authors’ and recipients’, pre-existing relationship to trauma can be provoked and explored.⁶⁴

Indeed, the middle voice “allows engagement with, critical distance on and self-reflexivity towards transferential relations rather than their disavowal.”⁶⁵ The third voice we hear in *What Is the What*, which is neither Eggers’s nor Deng’s but emanates from the collapsible space between them, strikes me as a plausible incarnation of this elusive but all-important middle voice. Eggers’s novel harnesses feeling in the face of suffering while continually reminding the reader that Deng’s experiences are not his or hers to inhabit. Rather than solidifying an already existing community, it calls a community of otherwise distant and disconnected people into being for the purposes of alleviating suffering. Or, to use Shamsie’s terms, the empathy loop, perpetually at risk of being closed, is kept precariously but determinedly open.

ENDNOTES

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2. Quoted in Shamsie, “The Storytellers of Empire.”
3. Shamsie, “The Storytellers of Empire.”
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Dave Eggers, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
12. Dave Eggers, *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng – A Novel* (2006. New York: Vintage, 2007).
13. Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). As his title suggests, Gregory argues that, far from being a matter of the past, colonialism is alive and well in the twenty-first century. Showing how the history of British and American involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine casts a long shadow on the present, in which colonial policies continue to be pursued under the guise of the so-called War on Terror, his book effectively counters the premature and obfuscatory celebration of the “post” in “postcolonial.”
14. See, e.g., Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313; Mary Ellmann, *Thinking about Women* (New York: Harcourt, 1968); Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970).
15. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 10.
16. Ibid., 9.
17. Ibid., 24.
18. Cathy Caruth, “Trauma and Experience,” introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 11.
19. See, e.g., Martha C. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
20. See, e.g., Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992); J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Derek Attridge, “Innovation, Literature, Ethics: Relating to the Other.” *PMLA* 114.1 (1999): 20–31.
21. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 52.
22. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*; Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
23. For a more extended discussion of trauma theory’s Eurocentric biases, from which this account is drawn, see Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
24. Susannah Radstone, “Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics.” *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory* 30.1 (2007): 25.
25. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 25.
26. Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*, 14–19.
27. Susannah Radstone, “Theory and Affect: Undivided Worlds.” In *Public Emotions*, ed. Perri 6, Susannah Radstone, Corinne Squire, and Amal Treacher (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 197.

28. Ibid., 198.
29. Ibid.
30. Mark Seltzer, "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere." *October* 80 (Spring 1997): 3.
31. Ibid., 3–4.
32. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 75.
33. Lauren Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics." in *Cultural Pluralism, Identity Politics, and the Law*, ed. Austin Sarat and Thomas R. Kearns (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 54.
34. Rosanne Kennedy and Tikka Jan Wilson, "Constructing Shared Histories: Stolen Generations Testimony, Narrative Therapy and Address." In *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time*, ed. Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 119–39.
35. Invisible Children, "Kony 2012." Online video clip, *YouTube*, March 5, 2012, accessed August 30, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc>.
36. Bruce Robbins, "The Worlding of the American Novel." In *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, ed. Leonard Cassuto (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1096–106.
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38. Aliko Varvogli, *Travel and Dislocation in Contemporary American Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2012), xiii.
39. Elizabeth Twitchell, "Dave Eggers's *What Is the What*: Fictionalizing Trauma in the Era of Misery Lit." *American Literature* 83.3 (2011): 624.
40. Valentino Achak Deng, Preface to *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng – A Novel*, by Dave Eggers (San Francisco: McSweeney's, 2006), 5.
41. Valentino Achak Deng, Preface to *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng – A Novel*, by Dave Eggers (New York: Vintage, 2007), xiv.
42. Varvogli, *Travel and Dislocation*, 26.
43. Deng, Preface 2007, xiv.
44. Dave Eggers, *Zeitoun* (San Francisco: McSweeney's, 2009).
45. So far thirteen volumes have appeared in the series, which is published by McSweeney's. They cover a wide variety of social justice topics, ranging from distant crises in Sudan, Burma, Zimbabwe, Colombia, and Palestine to wrongfully convicted prisoners, undocumented migrants, victims of Hurricane Katrina, women's prisons, and post-9/11 injustice in the United States. For further information, see <http://voiceofwitness.org/books/>
46. Dave Eggers, "It Was Just Boys Walking." *Guardian*, May 26, 2007, accessed August 30, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/may/26/featuresreviews.guardianreview29>
47. Quoted in Gregory Kirschling, "Dave Eggers on 'What Is the What,'" interview, *Entertainment Weekly*, October 28, 2007, accessed August 31, 2014. http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20154178_2,00.html
48. Lee Siegel, "The Niceness Racket." Review of *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng*, by Dave Eggers, *New Republic*, April 23, 2007: 50.
49. Ibid., 51.
50. Ibid., 51–52.
51. Ibid., 53.
52. Twitchell, "Dave Eggers's *What Is the What*," 637.
53. Ibid., 639.

54. Ibid.
55. Deng, Preface 2007, xv.
56. Eggers, *What Is the What*, 29.
57. Twitchell, "Dave Eggers's *What Is the What*," 642.
58. Eggers, *What Is the What*, 535.
59. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952. New York: Vintage, 1989), 3.
60. For a more in-depth comparative analysis of *What Is the What* and *Kony 2012*, see Sean Bex and Stef Craps, "Humanitarianism, Testimony, and the White Savior Industrial Complex: *What Is the What* versus *Kony 2012*." *Cultural Critique* 90 (Winter 2016): 32–56.
61. Twitchell, "Dave Eggers's *What Is the What*," 643.
62. Rick Crownshaw, "The Future of Memory: Introduction." In *The Future of Memory*, ed. Richard Crownshaw, Jane Kilby, and Antony Rowland (New York: Berghahn, 2010), 13.
63. Hayden White, "Historical Emplotment and the Story of Truth." In *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 37–53; LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*; Roland Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" In *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 134–56.
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CHAPTER THREE

AFFECTIVE HISTORIES AND PARTITION NARRATIVES IN POSTCOLONIAL SOUTH ASIA Qurratulain Hyder's *Sita Betrayed*



Rituparna Mitra

The unity of India was no longer merely an intellectual conception for me; it was an emotional experience, which overpowered me.

—Jawaharlal Nehru¹

We may need to wander amidst multiple ruins and practice an archeology of the comparative imagination.

—Michael Rothberg²

The Partition of the Indian subcontinent – into India and Pakistan in 1947 – was one of the crucial moments marking the break between the colonial and post-colonial era. It was a seminal event that violently pulled apart communities, polities, and cultures, deepening religious divisions that had not been as sharply drawn earlier. My essay looks afresh at the moment of Partition and nation-building, focusing on the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, to excavate affective histories of South Asia obscured by what Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, refers to as “the overpowering emotional experience” of nationalism.³ Nehru's exploratory urge to map South Asia as an “ancient palimpsest” to “know if there was any real connection between the past and the present” is echoed in Qurratulain Hyder's novel *Sita Betrayed*, which, however, casts memorialization in uncanny, darker terms.⁴ Hyder constructs a trans-subcontinental trauma sensorium – a memorial landscape shaped by sensory experiences – to contain the marginalized, affective histories of the Partition's *dispossessed* that are obscured by the celebratory narratives of the nation such as Nehru's *The Discovery of India*. The protagonist of Hyder's novel, Sita Mirchandani, a Sindhi refugee with a PhD in Sociology from Columbia University, is presented as a reader of obscure cultural and social histories that cannot quite be resolved within either the Nehruvian dialectic of antiquity within modernity that the new Indian nation confidently claimed, or the “newness” of an Islamic birth distanced from the subcontinent's past, that Pakistan declared.⁵ Her mapping of history and memory, as I will demonstrate, is structured via palimpsestic surfaces that represent a melancholic post-Partition South Asian landscape – one that also reflects the temporal breaks of history.⁶

Hyder particularly focuses on the post-Partition *landscape*, which is inflected with memory; her depictions are characterized by repeated gestures of unearthing the past. However, instead of offering the “harmonious closures,” which Nehru privileged in his readings on Indian history, her post-Partition memorial landscape offers a Benjaminian “anti-consolation.”⁷ Rather than being assimilated and digested into the present, the past is continuously disinterred in her narrative. The novella’s *mise-en-scène* is set up repeatedly with relation to “place” as the site of these irresolute and conflicting memories and histories.⁸ Hyder’s layered, expressive compositions of sensorially and mnemonically inflected South Asian “places” depict affective and spatial fault-lines, evocatively representing the Partition’s displacements and migrations, wherein hundreds of thousands of individuals lost their homes, families, and identities. My thesis is that Hyder mobilizes tropes of the palimpsest and of montage to construct spatial and temporal projections of mourning, melancholia, and memory.⁹ Thus, importantly, this focus on affective landscapes and histories enables her to intervene in theories of postcolonial trauma, by producing a new repertoire of affects/effects. Stef Craps and Gert Buelens, for instance, urge a move away from the pathologization and depoliticization of social trauma, seeking attentiveness to material (social and political) transformation alongside psychological and testimonial healing.¹⁰ Expanding these critiques, my essay seeks to show how Hyder’s work can also be recuperated through postcolonial trauma and affect theory, affectively evoking Partition mourning and memory in materiality, while also challenging Euro-American centric theories of trauma. In doing so, it is at the same time invested in moving beyond the “first wave” of Indian Partition scholarship with its focus on testimony, narrative, and the discursive – and heavily invested in realism and naturalism – on which I will elaborate later.

POSTCOLONIAL TRAUMA AND AFFECT

Narratives of the Partition such as Hyder’s are crucial in offering materially situated readings of trauma and affect theory in the context of South Asia. In re-examining her novel, I also want to return to studies of trauma and memory, which have been influenced by the affective turn in the humanities and social sciences.¹¹ Studies of affect are a significant entry point into understanding embodied emotion, memory, and trauma, for example, as they occurred in the Partition. They offer us, among other things, a way to chart the subject’s interaction with and immersion in the material, phenomenological world – a crucial aspect of understanding embodied, externalized, and collective emotions such as those associated with socio-political losses. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, for instance, present at least eight different theoretical orientations of affect in contemporary humanities.¹² Stemming from Deleuzian and Spinozian roots, understandings of affect have ranged further and in varied directions. As they put it, affect remains at its basic “a way to understand the body and its immersion in the world,” to understand “a body’s capacity to affect and be affected.”¹³ Affect marks a body’s belonging to a world of encounters.¹⁴ It is this responsiveness of the body, its openness and entanglement with the sensory, affective world that allows us both a way to analyze the materiality of trauma and to break out of the representational paradoxes and aporias with which established trauma theory wrestles.

One major trail within trauma studies' interaction with affect theory is that via the works of Ananya Kabir, whose interventions into Partition studies are groundbreaking. She claims that lyrical, affective modes co-exist within narrative modes in South and West Asian cultural formations, which might be more amenable than traditional state-sanctioned modes like statist historiography to understanding the sensorium and trauma of Partition.¹⁵ Her claim is not that affect or music is non-discursive. Music rhythm or lyric have their own discursivity and narrative range, hence it might be more productive to situate affect and discourse not as binaries but at angles to or *intersecting* with one another. Her point, as I understand it, is to suggest an alternative to "telling a story" and to narrative/testimony/talk being the privileged means of reparation and healing. It is a way to bring somatic and kinesthetic readings into play along with traditional textual/semiotic readings with their reliance on linearity and linear temporality. She does not, thus, propose a universal model but a possible way of including cultural productions that have traditionally fallen outside the South Asian "partition narrative oeuvre" with its over-reliance on the realist novel.¹⁶ Affect theory, for instance, helps us open these linear modes of expression into including somatic and sensual experiences.

My work, then, focuses on understanding the processes of mourning and memory in postcolonial South Asia via exploring emotions as collectivized practices, gestures, and representations.¹⁷ Athena Athanasiou, Pothiti Hantzaroula, and Kostas Yannakopoulos suggest a productive tension between the notions of emotion, affect, and *social* passion.¹⁸ Affect is of course a semantically slippery word to pin down; the notion of affect as "social passion," as "political suffering and trauma affected by the other, but also as unconditional and response-able openness to be affected by others – to be shaped by the contact with others" is at the crux of the theoretical channel between cultural/literary representation and socio-cultural trauma.¹⁹ This affective/sensory model allows us to bypass some aporias and erasures within trauma studies as it has been embraced in literary and social analysis. The sensorial grounding that we find in artists like Hyder is rooted deeply in everyday habitus and practice; her ways of responding to the world are profoundly entangled with elements of local "affect-worlds."²⁰ Bringing them under the aegis of trauma studies cannot proceed solely along existing theoretical lines.

Scholars of postcolonial trauma want to open the field up to questions of how societies – other than those traditional trauma studies has explored – grapple with their *collective* traumas. Stef Craps points out that most of these early trauma theorists marginalized or ignored traumas of non-western cultures.²¹ However, some like Allan Young had argued that "trauma" was "invented" in the late nineteenth century, and was "not timeless [but] glued together by the practices, technologies, and narratives with which it is diagnosed, studied, treated and represented."²² Affect theory adds to these modalities the collective sensoria through which "trauma" is experienced, expressed, negotiated, thus locating it within postcolonial affect-worlds.²³

In the 1980s and '90s, literary analysis (textualist, deconstructionist, located in the western academy) embraced studies in trauma. Like affect, trauma is a "tangled object" and can be approached through a number of lenses; in literary criticism it has mostly been approached via a semiotic, interpretive lens that deconstructive and post-structuralist critics were particularly oriented towards.²⁴ For example, Cathy Caruth explains the *aporia* inherent in a traumatic experience as a definite paradox: "the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it."²⁵

A further Freudian paradox is provided by the strange temporality of traumatic memory: an event can be understood as traumatic *after* the fact, through the symptoms and flashbacks that these signs of disturbance produce.²⁶ Thus, trauma as representational paradox and belated temporality is translated into crises of representation and narrative time in literary analysis.²⁷ Shoshana Felman in conjunction with Dori Laub, a psychiatrist working with Holocaust survivors, for instance, argues for trauma “as a radical crisis of witnessing [. . .] an event eliminating its own witness,” based in part on basing her conclusions on Holocaust testimonies.²⁸ This emphasis on a crisis in representing the traumatic experience remained the dominant model of literary trauma studies. Stef Craps, among other postcolonial trauma scholars, wants to move beyond focus on crisis in representation to the *materialities* (social and historical) of trauma narratives and their conditions of production and reception.²⁹ Ananya Kabir, as we have seen, also posits the affective as a way around the representational paradox, moving beyond the crises of representation and narrative exposition as ways to understand trauma in South and West Asia.³⁰

Furthermore, psychological models of understanding trauma have been largely focused on individual trauma. The means of restitution have often proceeded on “semiotic/linguistic/testimonial” lines rather than being embedded in social, material, and affective contexts. Rebecca Saunders and Kamran Scot Aghaie, however, approach this problematic via restoring spatial and temporal aspects to collective memory and mourning.³¹ And cultural and postcolonial trauma scholars, in particular, want to focus on the materiality of trauma and problematic of healing/reforming via material and sensory means. Interestingly, Frantz Fanon, in particular, is recuperated by most postcolonial trauma critics like Craps, Scott and Aghaie, and others, for his significance to this politically informed trauma studies.³² Ron Eyerman defines cultural trauma as a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group that has achieved some degree of cohesion.³³ He agrees that the linking of the past to the present through representations and imagination locates memory in a textual discourse,³⁴ but also urges a move to recognize “the impact of material culture on memory and identification.”³⁵ Providing us a route to map affect onto the material, he asks for interventions into forms *not articulated through language* but through the senses, or affective responses to music, art, or physical geography.³⁶ In his subsequent extension of the theoretical foundations of cultural/collective trauma, he reaffirms the material and affective embedding of these social/collective configurations.³⁷ I offer this critical survey to signal a new turn in Partition studies, which is deeply invested in an affective mapping of collective trauma.

RECASTING PARTITION STUDIES THROUGH AFFECT

These articulations of the varied trajectories of trauma and affect theory, thus lend themselves to Partition scholarship and enable us to recuperate through Qurratulain Hyder’s work *situated* evocations of mourning and memory in South Asia. Speaking of Hyder’s unique locatedness, Laurel Steele writes:

[Hyder] made choices to represent a [post-Partition] reality that was unacceptable to many [. . .]. She rejected binary divisions when the larger society embraced

those divisions. Urdu versus English (she claimed both); Muslim versus Hindu (she wrote of a syncretic culture where relationships were complex and symbiotic); India versus Pakistan (she wrote about both) to her, these divisions were simplistic and artificial.³⁸

Aijaz Ahmad has written evocatively about how Urdu literary and cultural production in South Asia was irrevocably changed by the Partition and yet its linguistic and cultural communities overrode statist borders.³⁹ It is important to point out here that while lyric poetry negotiated the Partition through metaphor and imagery, in most of immediate post-Partition Urdu fiction, there was a preoccupation with “documenting details” as if writing could provide *narrative* reparation from trauma.⁴⁰ The noted short stories of Saadat Hasan Manto, for instance, belong to this trend and faith in naturalistic representation. The feelings of exile and dislocation, however, and “the memory of what had been left behind” returned to *lyrically* and affectively haunt the subcontinent’s fiction in the mid-1950s. Ahmad observes that many of these writers (including Hyder), were preoccupied with “a *sense* [my italics] precisely, of *location* [italics original] in particular communities and in [. . .] historical time,”⁴¹ thus making them relevant to an affective and sensorial reading. One important influence on the work of Hyder was the genre of the *Naya Afsana* (New Story) of the 1940s and ’50s, which, according to Bodh Prakash, employed a psychologized realist stance to express contemporary situations employing newer perspectives.⁴² Some of the key themes of the New Story he identifies, such as fear and suspicion in personal relationships, the transience of human relationships, and the focus on women’s desires and sexualities, are also inflected in Qurratulain Hyder with Partition’s traumas. These inter-weaving themes offer an illuminating access to Hyder’s narrative.

While stories in the earlier realist stage, for instance by Manto, were focused on incidents, the New Story such as Hyder’s focuses on an interior scape, feelings of alienation, and other tropes that were common to post-industrial west and to the post-colonies, albeit in different ways.⁴³ In my understanding, then, the “inner realities” mapped by writers on *both* sides of the border – India and Pakistan – combined memory, affect, and the trauma of displacement in particularly *situated* ways, making them rich sources of study in postcolonial South Asian contexts.⁴⁴ One critic, Sukrita Paul Kumar, charts how representations of Partition’s dislocations in Hindi and Urdu literature interacted with modernist modes of representing fragmented ruptured twentieth century metropolitan worlds. She examines how the New Story is related to “an incomplete comprehension of life” (evocative of the cognitive and temporal lag of trauma) through its new artistic modes, thus situating “the modern aesthetic” in the subcontinent within “its own socio-political and cultural history.”⁴⁵

Thus, drawing on these modernist artistic modes, Qurratulain Hyder blurs the divide between mind/body, cognition/emotion, inside/outside, and private/public via the sensorial apparatus she employs. Here we can see how affect theory, giving us access to how emotions are exteriorized and how sensoria are embodied, can offer us a more penetrating look into Hyder and keep her work intellectually alive.⁴⁶ Additionally, Hyder’s composition of a sensorium of trauma through tropes of the palimpsest and modes of the montage, as mentioned earlier, allow spatial and temporal projections of grief and memory.⁴⁷ In sum, I believe, by exploring her affective landscapes and their histories we can get a distinctive sense of material traumas as

they permeated Partition history and shaped the conditions of postcoloniality that the subcontinent experienced as both independence and rupture.

PALIMPSESTIC HISTORIES AND AFFECTIVE SENSORIA IN *SITA BETRAYED*

Sita Betrayed is difficult to summarize as it is densely allusive. It charts the course of a few years in Sita's life (in the mid to late 1950s) after her return from Columbia University, her adulterous affair with a common friend, which leads to the collapse of her marriage with Jamil and loss of claims of custody over her young son, Rahul. At the very start of the novel, on an ordinary November afternoon, Sita hears that Jamil has remarried⁴⁸ a Spanish colleague at the United Nations. The novel's desultory, fragmented plot (if it may be called that), casts her among various isolating, melancholic landscapes: in Delhi where she lives, works, and moves among artist and theater friends, she remains isolated. Later, she travels with her cousin-in-law by marriage and friend, Bilqis, to Karachi for a family wedding where she meets the handsome and irreverent Irfan Kazmi. They grow emotionally closer as they undertake a journey through the landscapes of Sindh and Punjab, while being moved by the affective surroundings to unburden their memories to each other. They keep in touch clandestinely and later meet in Sri Lanka where Jamil and Irfan are both attending international conferences.⁴⁹ Sita plans to ask Irfan to negotiate with Jamil for custody rights over Rahul. The plan goes awry. She goes traveling among the ruins of Polonnaruwa where she meets an American political scientist with an amateur interest in archaeology, Dr. Leslie Marsh, and they begin a brief relationship. She then returns to a (violently jealous) Irfan. Irfan and Jamil bond over a common linguistic Awadhi heritage of Sufi Hindavi poetry and Irfan musters up the courage to tell Jamil he wants to marry Sita. Sita and Irfan move to Paris and for a brief while, seem happy. Soon after, news of Sita's father's demise in Delhi reaches them, and she leaves. While in Delhi during a bitterly cold winter, Irfan's letters grow rarer, until they almost stop. She then enters into a liaison with an old acquaintance, a very famous Bengali painter. Irfan hears the rumors and decides to break his silence. In the meantime, Jamil agrees to divorce her and Sita decides to return to Paris and writes Irfan a missive. On arriving in Paris on a cold rainy January afternoon, a strange man opens the door to their flat and tells the shocked Sita that Irfan Kazmi and Madame Kazmi (a young colleague) are on their honeymoon. The novel ends with strains of a familiar *ghazal* returning to haunt Sita along with memories of Bilqis lecturing someone on the transience and elusiveness of "real life" that cannot be captured in measured cinematic frames. A strong gust of wind bangs the door shut on unresolved inner lives.

Woven into the narrative of *Sita Betrayed* we can track the material and affective histories of South Asia, which are stacked next to each other, while emerging layer by layer, like a palimpsest. However, as I have mentioned in my introduction, she inflects these histories not with a sense of a Nehruvian celebration of India's pasts and future, but with a deep melancholy and irresolution. The repeated acts of reading and disinterring buried pasts by Sita, social historian par excellence and verbally expansive narrator of cultural pasts – is consistently marked by an eerie, melancholy slant. This has a lot in common with what Elizabeth Bowen (one of Hyder's acknowledged influences) calls spaces haunted by "presences" of "life in

pre-inhabited places.”⁵⁰ In Hyder, these presences in pre-inhabited places carry the weight of the Partition’s ruptures and divisions of communities. The first significant disinterment is performed interestingly not by Sita, but by her “annoyingly” melancholic mother (clinging to pre-Partition memories of their grand house in Karachi) while entertaining Sita’s friends and Muslim sister-in-law in their humble new home in Delhi’s Karol Bagh, “a small dark and narrow house that had been abandoned by some lower class Muslim family [their name Rahmat is inscribed on the house] during the Partition riots.”⁵¹ The description of the sparsely furnished room includes a large glossy print of the Hindu God Krishna above a massive almirah [cupboard] visibly reclaiming “Rahmat Manzil.”⁵² Sita’s mother probes behind this almirah and pulls out another framed print, which says in Arabic “There is no God but God and Muhammad is his Prophet.” She wants Bilqis, Jamil’s cousin, to take it so she doesn’t do something “improper by mistake.”⁵³ In this gesture of probing behind and pulling out material objects that had been hurriedly left behind, the uncovered past is emphatically permeated with resonances of insecurity, abandonment, and dispossession. The portable steel trunks in the room are rem(a)inders of the Mirchandanis’ mirroring journey from security and home (Daulat Rai Mahal in Karachi) to dispossession.

The *mise-en-scène* of dispossession described above, including the inscription of the previous owner’s name on the house, “Rahmat Manzil,” announces “other” lives through their violent evacuations. In this strain of excavating historical and memorial layers through material palimpsests, when Bilqis and Sita are in Karachi, Pakistan, for a family wedding, Bilqis berates her relatives for the absurdity of clinging on to old names of North Indian places in their recasting of Sindh as home. *Mohajirs* name their new homes in memory of places of their origin in Uttar Pradesh, India.⁵⁴ In a similar vein, Ram Bagh in Karachi, a familiar place from Sita’s childhood, is renamed Aram Bagh to de-Hinduize it. In displacements such as this one, where a single syllable deletes entire cultural and linguistic histories, yet retains traces of the disturbing original, we find more instances of the unsettling palimpsests Hyder employs to embody Partition trauma in layers of emotional historical associations. The post-Partition affective landscape was, and continues to be, informed by intransigent longings and desire for “specifically South Asian pasts” that Partition had rendered inaccessible.⁵⁵ However, this longing was punctured also by suspicion, bewilderment, and a sense of being caught between the familiar and the strange.⁵⁶ Ayesha Jalal, in fact, coins the terms “elseness” to describe the ambivalence of “mingling sameness with difference” that categorizes the relationship between citizens of the rival states in post-Partition South Asia.⁵⁷ The imperatives of citizenship create a dynamic of suspicion based on a paradox of same, but not quite.⁵⁸ I would argue that this charge of “elseness,” this paradox of same and not quite, inflected with suspicion, resonates strongly with Partition severances. While Jalal uses it to refer to co-religionists of rival nation-states, it could, I posit, be multiplied to configure the perplexing relationship between severed linguistic and cultural communities. The trope of “elseness,” carries associations of elsewhere (or the dialectic between home and elsewhere), an affective and spatial valence that is particularly relevant to Partition’s displacements and migrations. Reading post-Partition South Asia along the axis of “elseness” in Qurratulain Hyder’s *Sita Betrayed* quite strikingly constructs a trans-subcontinental sensorium to contain the supposedly marginal, affective histories of the Partition dispossessed.

This affective sensorial apparatus, which the novel evokes, can be explained further via Laura U. Marks' discussion of the memories of cultural displacement encoded in material objects.⁵⁹ Marks uses Deleuzian terminology to explain how when an image surfaces from another place, another culture, "it disrupts the coherence of the plane of the present culture [. . .] and brings its volatile contents to the present."⁶⁰ Most crucially for an affective reading, Marks argues that the meaning of objects is not encoded metaphorically but through physical contact.⁶¹ I will next analyze how psychologized landscapes like Sindh in *Sita Betrayed* are strewn with recollection objects, most often partially obscured, which are then activated through visceral contact, bringing together the senses, emotions, and histories accruing to the meaning of the material objects.

While the urban palimpsests in Karachi evoke haunting presences, Hyder chooses to locate her most unsettling disinterments in the deserts and riverine islands of Sindh.⁶² Sita and Bilqis along with their cousins and Irfan decide to drive from Karachi to Lahore and along this nostalgic journey, not only do Sita and Irfan get emotionally closer, they do so only by excavating memories and histories from the loss-infused landscape. Nostalgia plays a significant role here, as Nadia Seremetakis reminds us that while nostalgia often carries a pejorative sense of romantic sentimentality in English, in its original Greek, it refers to

the desire or longing with burning pain to journey. It also evokes the sensory dimension of memory in exile and estrangement; it mixes bodily and emotional pain and ties painful experiences of spiritual and somatic exile to the notion of maturation [. . .].⁶³

This affective understanding of nostalgia and memory in terms of the painful yet "transformative impact of the past" on the present is useful in my exploration of the melancholia that infuses this journey in Hyder's novel.⁶⁴

Hyder then, recasts Sindh as a ruin-dotted *mise-en-scène*; instead of statist archaeology, and the contemporary contestations between Hindus and Muslims over claiming the Indus and historical civilizations such as the Indus Valley, "place" here functions as a location for unsettled losses. Like Karen Till's postwar Berlin, Sindh embodies a landscape of trauma *mattered* by "presences and absences, voids and ruins, intentional forgetting and painful remembering."⁶⁵ Hyder's layered, expressive compositions uncover "minor" or marginalized histories and subjects of Partition trauma. There is a cruel, but too familiar (in terms of its repetition in the narrative), irony in Sita's pedagogical drive to interpret the landscape and its history to a disoriented and largely ignorant Irfan, when as a refugee in India they can be accessible to her only temporarily and mediated by the exigencies of citizenship.⁶⁶ Irfan's discomfort with the landscape, his surprise, and later his sense of inferiority as a cultural outsider (he is mockingly self-derisive and ashamed of his weakness in history, about not being able to converse in Sindhi with the feudal landlord, while Sita "the outsider" can), are all signposts of his displacement as a *Mohajir*, a refugee who came to Pakistan from North India. If Sita excavates personal and historical pasts from a once-familiar topography, Irfan uses his angled perspective as an "outsider" to inscribe global losses onto the ruins. Of course, he reads the ruins/runes for traces of his own dispossessed past in the Yamuna-Gangetic plains of India, but also invokes the homelessness and statelessness he has witnessed in his global travels.

Sita and Irfan's "discovery" of Sindh begins in the sand and dust-blown decrepit mud and reed houses of the ancient potters' city of Thatta that appear to Sita to be inhabited by all the wretched and homeless souls in the world. Immediately then, the desolation and decrepitude assumes a material, "sedimented" dimension, both via the ecological past of wind-borne erosions and deposits in the bordering Thar Desert and the rich cultural, intellectual, and architectural past of the region embodied in the massive stone mausoleums and crypts in the City of the Dead on Makli Hill. Makli Hill is known to Sindhis as the burial place of *sawa lakh* (125,000) saints in an area of roughly six miles. A study of this site by Annemarie Schimmel begins with her comments on the necropolis, and about the state's apathetic relationship with this heritage site.⁶⁷ Her cultural excavations present Thatta and the Makli Hill necropolis through various historical perspectives – from Orientalist accounts and eroticized travelers' tropes, to Amir Khusrau's frequent references to Thatta all the way from the Gangetic heartlands.⁶⁸ She also mentions the accounts of Sufi poets and scholars who congregated there in exile from Eastern Iran's Safavid dynasty. Sita reads this landscape through these exilic, migratory, and cross-pollinated rubrics, but multiplies them with the Puranic/Indic casting of Sindh via Sanskrit epics like the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* (a standard Nehruvian trope), moving through historical stages, conquests, migrations, and confluences (Greek, Scythian, Buddhist). She talks at length about the labile and emotionally shared religious life-worlds of Sufism in Sindh. However, there is none of the essentialist Nehruvian *claiming* of South Asian pasts as solely "Indic." Instead her evocations of these multiple histories are permeated with longing and anguish.

In contrast to Indian and Pakistani heuristic interpretive regimes, then, Sita continues to read the landscape and its features as runes of pain: for instance, she specifically recalls how she had hurt her leg badly once under a tree, prominent in the desert horizon, interrupting Irfan's uncomfortable silence and surprise at the profusion of graves in Sindh immediately after with an explosion of emotion: "'Don't you see that this my land? My fields – my villages – my saints' tombs?' Sita asked with some anguish."⁶⁹ In spite of Irfan's apparently apathetic and sarcastic banter with Sita, he too eventually starts excavating buried pasts. He asks Sita why Hindus attach sacredness to the *pipal* tree (*Ficus religiosa* or the sacred fig) recalling that whenever Muharram *tazias* (processions) touched a *pipal* tree, riots would break out. The unsettling disinterment of violent specters challenges the syncretistic accounts of Sufi life-worlds Sita had been painting. The challenge is quickly withdrawn, though when Irfan muses on how his mother, also moved by the syncreticism of shared lifeworlds, would light evening lamps, a Hindu ritual, under *pipal* trees. But the unsettlement lingers. Once again, the discovery of sedimented pasts does not thus proceed on the celebratory mode of Nehruvian national vision, but uncovers crypts as it were of both the Partition's losses and violence within the post-Partition landscape.

Later when Irfan asks Sita about her childhood in a Freudian move to relax her, memories of similar conversations with Jamil move her to a bitter anger.⁷⁰ In response, Irfan lets his guard down and reveals *his* reading of the ruin-dotted landscape that carries reminders of other losses: "You think I'm very unsentimental," he says, "but this question of a lost home bothers me too." He then draws from his travels a phantasmagoric vision of homeless people everywhere, in West Berlin, Hong Kong, Jewish refugee ghettos in America, Palestinian camps in Jordan, placing these in affective

relation to “the sudden metamorphoses” of four million people of South Asia who have undergone in their “thoughts, their feelings, their reaction to events” a veritable description of cultural trauma.⁷¹ This, in turn, encourages Sita to wander among multiple ruins within the comparative archaeology of her experiences as a Partition refugee in transit camps at various Indian locations.⁷²

Leaving behind the desolation and the dust- and wind-blown desert sands, the traveling party enters the Indus river plains, which are presented through the melancholic composition we have encountered previously. Hyder’s montages of the Sindhi landscape as layered pasts are far removed from the dominant claims of either nation-state on the region. While the archaeological remains of the Indus Valley Civilization were claimed by Nehru as “priceless relics” of *India’s* past, Pakistani historians like Aitzaz Ahsan went to lengths to historicize the separation of “the Indic” Gangetic plains and peninsular India from the Indus region, thus claiming its “multi-faceted” pasts for Pakistan.⁷³ Hyder, by spatializing melancholy through the (then) abandoned Hindu temple complex at Sadh Belo or Bela, an island in the river Indus near the town of Sukkur, continues, instead, to excavate minor, dispossessed pasts. The temple’s large pavilions are inscribed with Kabir’s verses, locating it immediately in the labile sacred spaces of “Bhakti” culture, analogous to the fluid Sufi identities of Sindh that resist religious binaries.⁷⁴ In the new Islamic state of Pakistan, these spaces are left to desolation. The signs of “pre-inhabited lives” are embodied in the hostels and clubhouses, which look “desolated and haunted.”⁷⁵ It is significant that only Sita and Irfan go around the island, reading traces of obscured histories. The rest of the party are tired after the journey, and watch them from a distance. We see Sita from their perspective – herself a haunted figure among the ruins. As Nadir, her brother-in-law, watches “Sita climbing the steps of a dark, brooding temple” he “feels sorry for her.”⁷⁶ This visual of Sita, as a lone figure among landscapes of void or loss, recurs many times in the novel.⁷⁷ The temple complexes of Sadh Bela have strange, hideous, and frightening stone figures fixed to them (possibly fierce tantric manifestations of Hindu deities), which cast the site in an eerie light; this eeriness is, however, emphatically linked to the unsettled traumas of Partition. Right under these fierce protecting figures is “graffiti”: Sita and Irfan read three separate injunctions/prayers scribbled onto the wall surfaces addressed to the Devi/Mother Goddess begging her to protect them as they are “going away,” “running away,” or “leaving [Her] behind” as they flee Partition violence for India. Each marking of graffiti mentions the exact day of the month in 1947, when they inscribed their desperation and insecurity onto the walls. Partition trauma materially (in stone) inscribes itself over spaces of sacredness and piety. The sensory horror of the Partition events seems to be frozen in stone here, and unmoored from the syncretic, labile affect-worlds embodied in Kabir’s verses. In another desolate temple, they stumble upon a life-size idol of Radha (again evoking Bhakti affective spaces) that “lay overturned on the floor” “in the heavy gloom” of the dying light of the sun.⁷⁸ The violence frozen in that act of destruction and the abject position of a life-like feminine figure haunt the atmosphere. Agitated, Irfan urges Sita to leave the temple. His agitation may be understood further by excavating his embeddedness in the Awadhi (found in the city of Lucknow) culture of Hardoi in North India carved by Radha–Krishna/Bhakti affect-worlds. Sita immediately likens the place to a *ghost* town and reminisces about *her* childhood, with its myths linking dreams to evil spirits that fly through the air glowing like lamps. Eerily she points out

signs of similar hauntings in the dusk around them. She adds that “Sadh Bela is the graveyard of [her] people.”⁷⁹

In these scenes that I have sketched, the affective projections of trauma, absence, and void onto the surrounding landscape and its multiple histories allows us access the characters’ interaction with and immersion in the material, phenomenological world. Instead of mobilizing an individualized psychologized model to trauma, there is an externalization, a steeping, and a collectivization that links it to the socio-political. So many histories of myth, religion, and personal memory converge here that the ghosts that haunt are not mere interior states, but reveal a lot about the material contexts of trauma. This sense of a traumatic “climate,” though she did not use the term *trauma*, is to be found in Elizabeth Bowen.⁸⁰ She writes that the hallucinations in her stories are not a peril; nor are they studies of mental peril. They are ways of completing fractured selves “emotionally torn and impoverished by changes.”⁸¹ These words resonate in Hyder’s evocation of emotionally torn “climates” of what I have been calling a trauma sensorium – and of selves fractured by memories and collective histories. Furthermore, Bowen also observes, “during the [first world] war, the overcharged sub-consciousnesses [sic] of everybody overflowed and merged.”⁸² In these scenes of travel and emotional excavations in Sindh, and repeatedly in the novel, Hyder mobilizes a similar overflowing and collective merging of Partition traumas.

Hyder’s spatialization of loss and its temporal breaks not only unmoors Sindh’s pasts from the conflicting claims of divided communities, but also colors the celebratory trajectory of postcolonial development in darker tones. Her excavation of Partition’s traumas transforms the Indus at Sukkur, with its massive barrages and efficient water management systems, into a riverscape of death. Sita’s childhood memories of decorating corpses of unmarried women in wedding finery – perhaps evoked by the overturned Radha idol – in turn evoke the hundreds of thousands of women raped and mutilated during Partition. In this climate of mourning Sita and Irfan share, there is an absence of specific references to Partition violence (*unlike the naturalistic stories in Partition literature*), but the sensorium of void and eeriness creates a specific access to Partition’s trauma that discursive narration cannot simply capture in its supposed record of facts.

On Sukkur Barrage, against the “massive awe-inspiring dam” (symbolic of colonial and neo-colonial statist projects), Sita is framed as “utterly alone, entirely helpless, and totally a stranger.”⁸³ The narrative tells us that Sindh of 1957 offered no sense of belonging, the address (in both senses of the term) provided by the landscape is to a Sita Mirchandani of Karol Bagh, Delhi;⁸⁴ it cuts her off from the emotional attachment she once could claim. Once again, the moonlight on the waves and the city lights in the distance interact with the darkness to add visual depth to the scene of dislocation. Yet, in spite, or perhaps because, of Sita’s impoverished claim, Sindh is even more firmly affirmed as belonging – contrary to statist logic – to those who are *most* dispossessed. In a biting retort to a teasing jibe from a cousin-in-law about *her* Sindh, Sita retorts firmly that Sindh is neither hers nor the old feudal families’ that have historically held socio-economic prominence, but to “those wretched *haris* whom you have never felt the need to think about.”⁸⁵ Hyder thus emphatically locates “Sindh” not within celebratory national pasts and futures, but within cultural and political losses arising out of *multiple minor* claims to the landscape by dispossessed subjects. By layering dispossession onto the landscape through trauma-infused

palimpsests, graffiti, and montages, Hyder excavates affective histories of the Partition that typically remain unmined.⁸⁶ She opens a way to read Partition trauma not as individualized pathology or a crisis in representation, but as a *material* and affective transformation of memory and subjectivity.

CONCLUSION

I conclude with some thoughts and reflections on our journey into this novel. On the one hand, Qurratulain Hyder's *Sita Betrayed* exhibits a proleptic awareness of a loss of future possibilities of the nation and community. At the same time, it uses memorial, affective, and material routes to try to connect back to these very lost possibilities. What can such modes of awareness offer? In *Mourning the Nation*, Bhaskar Sarkar speaks of a "proleptic melancholia" of the nation. The postcolonial nation is born in loss, he argues. It represents "the death of a collective dream at the moment of birth."⁸⁷ Sarkar contends that this proleptic melancholia "arises from a loss of futures and possibilities."⁸⁸ The "return" to the Partition staged in my essay should be located in this expanded memorial terrain as the specter of this particular form of melancholia. Furthermore, the events in Gujarat in 2002, the entrenchment of the Hindu nationalist State in India, and the growing insecurity of "minorities" across the nations of South Asia, make the "return" to the Partition more urgent than ever. In sum, my investment in re-examining the Partition through postcolonial trauma and affect theory stems from these exigencies. Hyder's mobilization of melancholia and haunting offers us a way to understand how the South Asian Partition endorses the value and promise of affect-mediated postcolonial trauma theory.

ENDNOTES

1. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*. Ed. Robert I. Crane (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1960), 27. The book was originally published by The John Day Company in 1946.
2. Michael Rothberg, "Decolonizing Trauma Studies: A Response." *Studies in the Novel* 40.1 and 2 (2008): 233.
3. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 27.
4. Ibid., 25. Hyder insisted on translating/transcreating her own work from Urdu into English, although as the process was slow, very few of these are available to English readers. *Sita Haran* (1960) remains the rare work she allowed someone else – C.M. Naim – to translate after much persuasion. See M. Asaduddin, "Lost/Found in Translation: The Author as a Self-Translator." In *Qurratulain Hyder and The River of Fire: The Meaning, Scope and Significance of Her Legacy*, ed. Rakshanda Jalil (Oxford, New York and Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 158. *Sita Betrayed* is part of Naim's edited collection of three translated short stories and novels titled *A Season of Betrayals* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17–163.
5. Postcolonial Indianness in Nehruvian imaginary and praxis comfortably went back to India's pre-colonial *Sanskritic* past to cast its modernity. "Foreign influences often poured in and influenced that culture and were absorbed," writes Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 31. For Nehru's discomfort with Indian Muslims' search for cultural roots outside India in Baghdad, Spain, and Constantinople, see esp. p. 262. Official Pakistani historiography in the '50s worked to erase this common South Asian past, looking instead to "the Arab

- element” to forge a new identity. See Aitzaz Ahsan, *The Indus Saga and the Making of Pakistan* (Oxford, New York and Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10. See also a reading of Nehru’s “Tryst with Destiny” speech against Jinnah’s call for inaugurating “a titanic, unknown unparalleled plan.” In ed. Ananya Kabir, “Deep Topographies in Fiction of Uzma Aslam Khan.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47.2 (May 2011): 173–185. See esp. p. 177.
6. My use of palimpsests as a trope weaving materiality of memory in lived spaces with literary reading techniques is drawn from Andreas Huyseyn, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), esp. p. 7.
 7. See Martin Jay, “Against Consolation: Walter Benjamin and the Refusal to Mourn.” In *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 221–239.
 8. There is critical precedent for the “cinematic” elements in Hyder’s work. See for instance, Aijaz Ahmad, *In the Mirror of Urdu: Recompositions of Nation and Community 1947–65* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1993), 10. See also Kumkum Sangari, “Viraha: A Trajectory in the Nehruvian Era.” In *Poetics and Politics of Sufism and Bhakti in South Asia: Love, Loss and Liberation*, ed. Kavita Panjabi (Kolkata: Orient Black Swan, 2011), 256–287.
 9. Ahmad, *In The Mirror of Urdu*, argues that Hyder in *Aag ka Darya* deploys montage, very much Eisensteinian to assemble landscapes as regenerative, 10. Sukrita Paul Kumar in her interview with Hyder in *Conversations on Modernism* also brings up the author’s deployment of cinematic montages, 58.
 10. See Stef Craps and Gert Buelens, “Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels.” *Studies in the Novel* 40.1 and 2 (2008): esp. 4–6.
 11. See Patricia Clough, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.
 12. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, ed., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), see esp. Introduction 1–25.
 13. *Ibid.*, 2.
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. See Anaya Jahanara Kabir, “Beyond Narrative: Song and Story in South Asia.” *Moving Worlds: A Journal of Transcultural Writings* 5.2 (2005): 34.
 16. *Ibid.*, 35.
 17. See, in particular, Catherine Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod, *Language and the Politics of Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 11.
 18. Athena Athanasiou, Pothiti Hantzaroula, and Kostas Yannakopoulos, “Towards a New Epistemology: The ‘Affective Turn’.” *Historein* 8 (2008): 6.
 19. *Ibid.*
 20. Hyder in her essay “Novel and Short Story: Modern Narratives” in *Narrative: A Seminar*, ed. Amiya Dev (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994), 208, speaks of “atmosphere,” a particular ethos which she compares to “a period film set,” as a take-off point for her artistic techniques. Ananya Kabir has coined the term “affect-worlds” in “Affect, Body Place,” in *The Future of Trauma Theory*, ed. Buelens, Durrant and Eaglestone (London: Routledge, 2014), 72–73, to compass embodied locales (epidermal, sensorial) that ground a subject’s emotional and cognitive relationship with the world. Trauma violently fractures these embodied networks as well as the psyche.
 21. Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2.
 22. Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 5.
 23. See note 20.

24. Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 15.
25. Cathy Caruth quoted in Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 4.
26. *Ibid.*, 5.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Felman and Laub quoted in *ibid.*, 7.
29. Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*, 5.
30. See note 15
31. Rebecca Saunders and Kamran Scott Aghaie, "Introduction: Mourning and Memory." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25.1 (2005): esp. 17–20.
32. See Craps, esp. 28–29 and Scott and Aghaie, 20. Scott and Aghaie write that Fanon not only re-embedded individuals within a social context and disrupted European psychology with African experience, but also reintegrated the material meaning of trauma into a term that had largely become psychologized.
33. Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.
34. *Ibid.*, 3
35. *Ibid.*, 8.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Ron Eyerman, *Narrating Trauma: On the Impact of Collective Suffering* (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2011), esp. Introduction xi–xxxv.
38. Laurel Steele, "'We Just Stayed on the Ship to Bombay . . .' Tea and Consequences with Qurratulain Hyder." *Annual of Urdu Studies* 23 (2008): 187.
39. Ahmad, *In The Mirror of Urdu*, 3–4.
40. *Ibid.*, 4.
41. *Ibid.*, 5.
42. Bodh Prakash, *Writing Partition: Aesthetics and Ideology in Hindi and Urdu Literature* (Delhi, Chennai and Chandigarh: Pearson Longman, 2009), 33.
43. *Ibid.*, 17–47.
44. See Sukrita Paul Kumar, "'Ammā Basant Kya Hoti Hai?': Turns of Centuries in *Aag ka Darya*," in *Qurratulain Hyder and The River of Fire: The Meaning, Scope and Significance of her Legacy*, ed. Rakshanda Jalil (Oxford, New York and Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 107–116, for a situated understanding of displacement and memory. Kumar reminds us that this groundbreaking Urdu novel was written in response to Hyder's niece in Karachi (a daughter of migrants from North India) asking what the Hindustani word for Spring *Basant* meant. This term was unusual to her as opposed to the Farsi-inflected term *Bahaar* due to post-Partition Statist linguistic regimes. With the loss of the Sanskrit word, was lost an entire sensorium embodied in North Indian (Ganges-Yamuna valley) Springs distinct from the marine and desert influences in Karachi.
45. Sukrita Paul Kumar, *The New Story: A Scrutiny of Modernity in Hindi and Urdu Short Fiction* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1990), 32, 19. Both Prakash and Paul Kumar briefly mention Hyder; Prakash comments on her representation of intermingled histories and the "macrocosm" in *Aag ka Darya* (160), and Paul Kumar writes of "her beautiful merger of the past with the present and a fine treatment of human history with private sentiment in her short stories (31).
46. Hyder in an interview with Sukrita Paul Kumar, *Conversations on Modernism* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1990), 53. Hyder acknowledges that both Urdu scholarship with its outmoded models and western academia where her works were not accessible mostly due to lack of translations, have ignored her leaving her works bereft of "a literary life."
47. By sensorium I mean a phenomenological world shaped by sensory experiences.

48. Sita and Jamil had a religious wedding ceremony so Jamil could remarry under the existing laws for Muslim marriage in 1950s India.
49. In these conferences, we get a glimpse of the Non-Aligned Movement and international reorganization in the Cold War Era.
50. Hyder in her essay “Novel and Short Story: Modern Narratives,” in *Narrative: A Seminar*, ed. Amiya Dev (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994), 209, acknowledges among her influences Virginia Woolf and especially Elizabeth Bowen. See Elizabeth Bowen in “Frankly Speaking: Interview, 1959,” in *Listening In: Broadcasts, Speeches, and Interviews by Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. Allan Hepburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 324, for more on this “haunting.”
51. Qurratulain Hyder, *Sita Betrayed*. Trans. C.M. Naim (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 44.
52. *Manzil* can mean both destination and level/storey in Urdu, making it a popular name for Muslim homes.
53. Ibid.
54. A term borrowed from Arabic with evocations of *hijrat* (the historic migration from Mecca to Madina) to describe the refugees from North India who migrated to Pakistan. Hindu refugees were called *sharanarthi*s.
55. Ananya Kabir, *Partition's Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2013), 23.
56. See Joginder Paul's *Sleepwalkers*. Trans. Sunil Trivedi and Sukrita Paul Kumar (New Delhi: Katha 1998), 11–110.
57. Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 570.
58. Ibid.
59. Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2000). The use of cinematic and visual theory to describe Hyder's work has strong critical precedent. See note 9.
60. Ibid, 77.
61. Ibid., 80.
62. See Aitzaz Ahsan, *The Indus Saga and the Making of Pakistan* (Oxford, New York and Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), for Ahsan's riposte to Nehru's Indic claim over the region.
63. Nadia C. Seremetakis, ed. *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), 4.
64. Ibid.
65. Karen Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 8.8
66. See scene at the railway station in Lahore and the confusion of the police who cannot equate Sita's last name Jamil with her Indian citizenship and Pakistani relatives, in Hyder, *Sita Betrayed*, 82–83.
67. Annemarie Schimmel, *Makli Hill: A Center of Islamic Culture in Sindh* (Karachi: Institute of Central and West Asian Studies, University of Karachi, 1983), 5.
68. Ibid., 6. Schimmel quotes Khusrau: “A cypress like you is not in Ucch or Thatta, / A rose like your pretty face is certainly not existent.”
69. Hyder, *Sita Betrayed*, 55–56.
70. Ibid., 59.
71. Ibid., 60.
72. Rothberg, “Decolonizing Trauma Studies,” 233.
73. See esp. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, 33–37 and Ahsan, *The Indus Saga*, 8–9.

74. Kabir was a mystic poet and saint and an important figure in the Bhakti movement in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in South Asia; he was of labile religious identity and constructed syncretic religious subjects through his intensely emotional *dohas* or couplets. Hyder, in “Novel and Short Story,” 214, mentions her situatedness within the “humanism” of Sufism. For more on how the Bhakti and Sufi traditions informed cultural, political, and affective spheres in South Asia, see Kavita Panjabi, ed. *Poetics and Politics of Sufism and Bhakti in South Asia: Love, Loss and Liberation* (Kolkata: Orient BlackSwan, 2011), esp. Introduction 1–52.
75. Hyder, *Sita Betrayed*, 66.
76. Ibid.
77. This may be linked with representations of *viraha* focusing on the emotions of the heroine and hinging on her sense of estrangement and vulnerability especially in relation to her surroundings. For more see Sangari, “Viraha, 256–287.
78. Hyder, *Sita Betrayed*, 66.
79. Ibid., 67.
80. Elizabeth Bowen, “The Demon Lover: Preface to the American Edition.” In *Collected Impressions* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1950), 48.
81. Ibid., 49.
82. Ibid., 48.
83. Hyder, *Sita Betrayed*, 68.
84. Ibid.
85. From *Harijans*, a child of Hari/Vishnu, a term popularized by Mohandas Gandhi for referring to Dalits, or Untouchables. Hyder, *Sita Betrayed*, 68.
86. See Rothberg, “Decolonizing Trauma Studies,” 225.
87. Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 42.
88. Ibid.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE UNSETTLED SPACE OF IDENTITY FORMATION IN SAMIR NAQQASH'S *SHLOMO AL-KURDI*, *MYSELF AND TIME* (2004)



Amel A. Mahmoud

Samir Naqqash (1938–2004) was a prolific Iraqi Jewish novelist, short story writer, and a playwright. Though compelled to leave Iraq at the age of thirteen, during the mass expulsion of the Jews in 1951,¹ Naqqash remained profoundly attached to his birth country. Such an attachment is clearly expressed in his novels and short stories that depict the ancient Baghdadi neighborhoods, traditions, and norms practiced by the Jewish community there, as well as the ups and downs of the Jewish experience in Iraq.² His choice to write in Arabic, despite his mastery of Hebrew, is another factor testifying to Naqqash's firm bond to his birth country – a choice that prevented him from gaining the fame and recognition he was most worthy of³ and ruled out any institutional support inside Israel.⁴ Thus, the complex entanglements of ethnic identity and religious affiliation that have marked the geo-politics of the Middle East for the past two centuries, clearly influenced both the life and works of the author.

Naqqash's literary works invariably incorporate significant themes such as the complexity of identity construction, which often draws on religious, ethnic, and race factors, as well as the challenges and the setbacks encountered in the life of the exile. In *Nazwala wa Khaytt ash-Shaytan* (1986), trans. *The Lodgers and Satan's Net*, the author deftly portrays the grueling circumstances a group of lodgers, both Jewish and Muslim, sharing the same house in an old neighborhood in Baghdad, confronts in the early fifties. Throughout this novel, Naqqash raises a crucial question regarding identity formation: what does it mean to be an "Iraqi Jew" when one of the leading characters confronts the arduous decision of renouncing his Iraqi citizenship in order to be deported to Israel?

Negotiating one's identity within memories of the debilitating circumstances of immigration and exile is a particularly compelling theme explored in Naqqash's last novel *Shlomo al-Kurdiwa Ana waz-Zaman* (2004), trans. *Shlomo al-Kurdi, Myself and Time*. Being a semi-autobiographical novel gives the text a special significance while it elaborates on two episodes of the exile of the Jews from two countries: Iran and Iraq. The bloody massacres of the Jews first by the Russians, then by the Ottomans in Iran in 1918, and the compulsory deportation of the Jews of Iraq to Israel in the fifties of the twentieth century highlight the political upheaval that swept this

region, which radically altered not only the political scene in the Middle East, but also the demographical map during two significant historical periods: the colonial and the postcolonial eras.

In this novel and while portraying detailed accounts of the aggressive conditions of the exile of the Jews from Sablakh⁵ in 1918, Baghdad in 1951, and Tehran in 1961, the text cultivates one of the important postmodern narrative techniques, which is the use of three narrators. These are: the first person narrator, the protagonist⁶ as an old worn-out character recalling his memories while he is on death bed in Israel; the second person narrator, the protagonist as a young affluent merchant in Sablakh (a city in Iran) and then in Baghdad (the capital of Iraq); and the third person narrator, Time, who appears as the *all knowing narrator* and whose narration completes the episodes missing in the accounts of the two narrators.

The protagonist is first depicted as an elderly Kurdish Jew from the Middle East living in the suburb of Tel Aviv, Ramat Gan. The starting date is not clearly indicated but often referred to as “now” which is to some critics, a reference to a period close to 2004. From the very beginning of the novel, Shlomo seems oblivious to his surrounding, and totally immersed in his recollection of memories. With the absence a proper sequence of past events, the protagonist delves in reminisces related to his joyful days in Baghdad from (1919–1951). The current of memories drifts to the oppressive time when the Iraqi Jews had to depart the country, when Shlomo and his family faced no choice but to travel to Tehran in 1961. Years of his exile in Iran and his final journey to Tel Aviv, the last destination, are elaborately depicted through the use of the flashback technique. The rest of the novel returns much further back in time to Sablakh in 1914, narrating a detailed account of the protagonist’s youth, his two marriages, the Russian invasion of the city, the Ottomans massacres, and the Persian skirmishes.

While depicting dreadful episodes of the immigration and displacement of the Jews in this novel, the complexity of identity formation, caught in the character of the protagonist, Shlomo, is accentuated and offers a useful template, mapping the exigencies of identity formation through the complex, transnational histories of the Middle East, and the specific challenges faced by Jews of different ethnicities. In examining the protagonist’s formation and affirmation of his identity/ties, I incorporate the following key terms in the discussion: identity, “cultural memory” and “figures of memory.” For example, in his book *Cultural Studies*, Chris Baker defines “identity” as “an emotionally charged discursive description of us that is subject to change.”⁷

This tendency towards an unfixed and liable-to-change realization of the self is clearly evident in *Shlomo al-Kurdi, Myself and Time*. While reminiscing about arduous episodes of immigration, Shlomo alternates between different self-realizations based, sometimes, on his Jewish religion and at other times, on his Kurdish ethnicity. This makes the protagonist a strikingly complex and dynamic character, one whose dilemmas reflect the pressures and demands of different loyalties and affiliations. Therefore we can observe that while asserting a particular identity, the protagonist manifests three main inclinations; explicitly disclosing, intentionally concealing and willingly choosing/preferring a particular mode of self-definition.

This process of accentuating a distinct self, whether religious or ethnic, involves a cultivation of the “cultural memory” of the Jewish community to which Shlomo belongs and from which he derives his knowledge and impulses to constitute that

identity. In his useful article “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” Jan Assmann defines “cultural memory” as:

A collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive frame-work of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation.⁸

Like Assmann, Maurice Halbwachs also illustrates the term, metaphorically, as a storage that is fixed and not subject to alter with the passing of time: “*mémoire qui ne soit éphémère.*”⁹ It is maintained, according to Halbwachs, through “figures of memory,” which may come in a variety of forms such as: texts, epics, poems, images, monuments, festivals, rites, and institutional communication such as recitation, practice, and observance.¹⁰ Hence, societies, communities, or groups tend to base their consciousness of unity and specificity upon the knowledge stored in these “figures of memory,” deriving impulses from them in a manner, while allowing the group to explicitly represent its identity.

Following and illustrating a similar practice, the novel *Shlomo* attests to the protagonist’s religious or ethnic identity through constantly delineating the Jewish rituals, rites, traditions, Kurdish festivals, ancestors’ legacy, cultural practices, and all other forms and figures of memory that are maintained throughout generations. Through a close reading of selected scenes from *Shlomo al-Kurdi, Myself and Time*, linking their literary features with the cultural memory along with its basic elements represented by figures of memory, this discussion investigates the protagonist’s different deployments of identity with a tendency to fluctuate between his religious allegiance and the ethnic one. In exploring the protagonist’s navigations of self-hood, my close reading maps his three main tendencies towards identity recognition: boldly declaring, willingly camouflaging, and purposefully preferring a particular mode of self-representation.

Throughout the novel, and on various occasions, the author explicitly affirms and highlights the Jewish identity of the protagonist. A clear instance is apparent in the scene, which describes the religious rituals held the night before the Passover, Shlomo gives an account on the significance of this feast: the prayers and recitations performed, the costumes worn, and the food prepared, combined with the hospitality norms:

He (Shlomo) returned from Izra David Temple in Battawen after Saturday Depart and Feast Visit prayers. This is a special feast that came after Saturday and many holy days following a sacred day. Following his own ritual each year, Shlomo took a myrtle twig to his wife Asmar. He didn’t feel the need to change his clothes, his Saturday costume is elegant enough for the feast. He was in a hurry, no Jew will sleep tonight, they shall all stay awake joining the clerks praying for the souls of the dead.¹¹

The splinter of reminiscence, recalled by the protagonist here, is fertile with figures of memory such as the cultural traditions (offering myrtle twigs to family members) and the religious practices (spending the night in prayers at the temple). These are revered Jewish practices stored in the “cultural memory” of the community, generation after another. Still the significant point here is that remembering details of the feast comes

within the episode about the well-known historical event called *Farhud*, when the Jews were savagely attacked in Baghdad in 1941.

The protagonist unfolds details about the religious ill-omens observed before that brutal attack. He narrates that in a temple in Al-Qush, Mordechai holds the ceremony of reviving the memory of the Prophet Nahum filling the candle-beds with water and oil. After a short time, Mordechai notices with horror that the water and the oil have turned into blood: “The flames of all of the candles and the lamps were glittering, but the color of the water and the oil had turned into a deep blood red” (*Shlomo al-Kurdi*, 48).

The turning of the water and oil in the temple lamps into blood evokes the well-known historical story of the Passover in the Book of Exodus where the waters of the Nile were turned into blood, as well as the story of Hanukkah, where the candles in the Temple in Jerusalem remained lit for eight days despite the scarcity of oil.¹² Evidently, in the previous scene, the appalling prophecies before *Farhud* attack with all its religious symbols and figures of memory along with the Passover rituals formulate a storage of knowledge from which a community, the Jews in Baghdad, derives its awareness, unity, and distinctive character. An awareness in this scene can be clearly summed up as “we are this” or negatively “that’s our opposite”¹³ or rather “our enemy,” even though the identity of the assaulters is not made clear. Here we can see how the consequence of that recognition and division is an affirmation of the religious identity of the protagonist, which is inevitably intertwined with the religious identity of the community in a decisive time while fearing for their lives.

Another scene where a fear for life stimulates the impulses to affirm the Jewish identity of the protagonist is apparent when Shlomo goes further back in time, recalling his early youth in Sablahk-Iran. Here in the persona of an astute strong-willed merchant he is called to meet the Shah of Iran, Ahmed, to defend himself against the accusation of selling weapons to the Kurdish rebels. Amid grueling feelings of alarm and dismay, Shlomo remembers how he stood steadily clinging to his religious faith while denying the accusation, and his Kurdish ethnicity.

“You are provoking the Kurds to revolt against the king?”

“I am . . . my lord . . . a Jew . . . a merchant. . . . I have no business in the king’s affairs.”

“How dare you make lies before your lord?”

I took my *tefillin* out of my bag intending to defeat that accusation:

“My lord, this is the name of God and I swear now I have never provoked anyone against the government neither talked to an . . .”

In a fit of rage, the Shah interrupted me:

“Don’t swear and lie while you are carrying the word of God in your hands. Do you deny that you sell the Kurds arms you bought from Russia?”

“I am a trader.” (*Shlomo al-Kurdi*, 114)

The allegation could have definitely resulted in Shlomo’s execution, yet his reliance on the cultural memory through cultivating various forms of figures of memory – the Hebrew *tefillin* on which Shlomo takes an oath on before the Shah and the recitation of litanies and prayers – save his life and set him free. In this scene, Shlomo, who strongly shares his profound reverence of the scripture and the religious practices

with his community, indisputably manifests his membership in that community, hence, binding himself to a distinct Jewish identity. The Shah of Iran evidently recognizes and acknowledges that membership to the extent that it becomes the reason and the ground for pardoning Shlomo. In the end, the Shah says, “If you weren’t a Jew and like all Jews whose sole concern is money, I would have you hanged in the main street” (*Shlomo al-Kurdi*, 114).

The protagonist uninterruptedly proceeds in his recollection of memories through the technique of flashback. He, with a sense of alarm and dismay, recalls a calamitous event that occurred in Sablakh during the winter of 1915. The town has tragically turned into a site of bloody conflicts between the army of Tsar Nikolai II and the Ottomans. When pressures increase, the Russians withdraw, leaving the town open to the advance of the Ottoman troops. With terror, the Jewish community realizes that the massacre of the Armenian Christians might be repeated again in their town. Amid such appalling feeling, Shlomo relates to his wife, Asmar, the horrifying scenes of the massacre:

They killed Haneen Banu, the owner of the tobacco shop, they killed his son Mushi. They also butchered two more people with no guilt just like that. They found Haneen and his son stabbed in their bellies and thrown in the mud. They were in their way to the temple. . . . I went to the Ottoman leader to protest. He was rude and harsh swearing he would be crueller with us describing the Jews as the spies of the enemy, the Russians.

(*Shlomo al-Kurdi*, 166)

The protagonist recognizes that the “lunacy of the world” is about to get loose. This recognition turns into a nightmare when Esther, his second wife, and the two children were brutally killed by the Ottoman soldiers. Throughout these grinding circumstances, Shlomo’s attachment to his religion grows intense: “Abu Salman [Shlomo] was praying to God, pleading Him with all the names of all the prophets, saints and pious people to end the dread of war, the foolishness and cruelty of man” (*Shlomo al-Kurdi*, 167). In this scene, the cultural memory of the Jewish community is invigorated through configuring different forms of figures of memory; reciting litanies, saying prayers, and intensively invoking names of prophets, saints, and mystics for protection. Consequently, the Jewish identity of the protagonist is accentuated along with the identity of the community with whom he shares these religious performances. Thus, it becomes explicit that whenever he confronts a perilous situation or a circumstance of looming death, he tends to assert his Jewish identity by evoking his cultural memory, and fortifying its figures of memory in order to get protection and security while binding the self with his community.

However, in the various experiences and personas Shlomo takes on, there are reversed situations where the protagonist inclines to *conceal* his religious/Jewish identity for the same aim, obtaining protection and security. This tendency is obviously discerned in the memory recalled by the protagonist about his journey to India early in his youth.

It is the Jewish fasting period and Shlomo, being a rabbi, has to eat only Kosher¹⁴ and vegetables, never uses the plates of the other passengers rather his own utensils, and often indulges in the recitation of prayers and litanies. Cultivating these figures of memory accentuates his Jewish identity and renders him distinctly different from

the other passengers around him, the Arabs. Significant enough, this particular scene emphasizing disparity through the religious affiliation ignites other lines of realization of differences related to ethnicity, language, and race. Shlomo narrates:

Those are the Arabs of the Gulf, they are gazing at me with suspicion and detestation and I cautiously steal glances. If I utter one word, things may get complicated. A traveler who speaks Arabic with an accent, a hybrid, a Kurd, a Jew. . . . I am all those, all those make me. An immigrant, a bold trader and an adventurer.
(*Shlomo al-Kurdi*, 18)

Differences here are undeniably caught in multiple levels between the protagonist's affiliations (religion, race, hybrid origin and language) and the Arab passengers' allegiances. The broad spectrum of disparity creates two distinct groups where Shlomo is on one side and the Arabs on the other. The connection/difference between the two can be summed up in two terms: "I" in opposition to "them." Such disparity is illustrated by Kathryn Woodward in *Concepts of Identity and Difference*, when she states:

Difference is what marks out one identity from the other and establishes distinctions; often in the form of oppositions . . . identities were constructed through a hostile opposition of "us" and "them." The marking of difference is thus the key component in any system of classification.¹⁵

This "hostile opposition of 'us' and 'them'" is clearly indicated when Shlomo describes the attitudes of the Arab passengers towards him: "they are gazing at me with suspicion and detestation." In consequence and in order to maintain his safety, Shlomo tends to seclusion, preferring not to communicate with other travelers and often performing his religious rituals in secrecy and silence. Hence, while acknowledging the differences between his own identity and the other travelers', Shlomo tends *not* to accentuate or even clearly reveal his Jewish affiliation, rather concealing it, a thoughtful and rational tactic to survive. Thus, it is clear that there are some circumstances where Shlomo needs to explicitly stress his allegiances and others where he willingly camouflages them. This tendency attests to Philip Gleason's argument when he emphasizes that certain realizations of the self can be "consciously emphasized or de-emphasized as the situation requires."¹⁶

Shlomo al-Kurdi, Myself and Time also manifests a third tendency of the protagonist towards his self-realization, which is a preference to define the self through one identity rather than the other. Such a process is explained by Amin Maalouf in *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*. Here he illustrates how an individual, owing to a certain circumstance, inclines to accentuate one identity rather than the other:

Every individual is a meeting ground for many different allegiances, and sometimes these loyalties conflict with one another and confront the person who harbours them with difficult choices.¹⁷

Confronting different choices, "loyalties," and the need to affirm one rather than the other is noticeable in the scene when the protagonist looks back to his flourishing

days in Baghdad. Shlomo recalls how he, among all the other titles people often address him with such as *al-Kitani*, insists to write on the door of his shop and in golden letters “Shlomo, The Kurd” tightly attaching himself to his race and ethnic affiliation: “Yes, Shlomo, the Kurd and not *al-Kitani*. I insisted with my Kurdish stubbornness and sternness on this title” (*Shlomo al-Kurdi*, 43). Shlomo himself lends a justification to this inclination, preferring his ethnic identity to his religious one, when he clarifies, “I wanted to avoid any reference to the immigrants, to the exiled, those attached to poverty, humiliation and all the negative attributes” (*Shlomo al-Kurdi*, 43).

After suffering the devastating conditions of compulsory deportation from the ancestor’s city Sablahk, Shlomo wishes, while establishing a new prosperous life in Baghdad, to disconnect himself from that humiliating history by renouncing any reference to it and preferring instead to be recognized through his ethnic origin, the Kurd. This disconnection with an undesirable past is apparent here in his rejection of the family label “al-Kitani,”¹⁸ a title known for a long time to be of a Jewish family trading in linen. In this scene, the inclination to highlight the ethnic identity, rather than the Jewish one, clearly demonstrates that identity is contingent, and can never be imposed by the society in absolute terms; it is rather a choice, a decision made by the individual owing to specific reasons or in response to particular conditions. Thus, despite the strong affiliations to the figures of memory that bind a person such as Shlomo to his religion and its affiliated culture, he is not averse to repressing experiences of expulsion and exile and insist on his Kurdish origins when the moment calls for it.

Shlomo al-Kurdi, Myself and Time exquisitely portrays the protagonist’s journey into his memories re-living and moving through episodes of deportation and exile. While uninterruptedly recalling these reminiscences, Shlomo shifts, in his recognition and assertion of his identity, between the religious Jewish identity and the ethnic Kurdish one. His approach and expression of these personas and identifications vary from clearly articulating his Jewish identity in order to save his life, to a reversed situation where hiding his religious affiliation is the only path towards survival. A third attitude is discerned when Shlomo reveals a plain preference to renounce his Jewish affiliation, since it is connected with a sorrowful history of exile, and firmly binds himself with his ethnic roots, the Kurdish race. Despite camouflaging and preferring a particular persona over another, it is quite telling that the protagonist’s frequent reliance on the Jewish cultural memory also constantly reinvigorates figures of memory, which constitute the nourishing blood of that religious affiliation and communal identification.

In *Shlomo al-Kurdi, Myself and Time*, Naqqash successfully explores the appalling Jewish past of deportation and expulsion, with all the complexities involved in the divisions of identity, reconstructions of memory, and the blurring of different realities. The adroit treatment of these complex themes renders the novel among the vital contemporary texts that “emerged precisely out of the Mizrahi problematic, with all its attendant concerns about identity, memory, language.”¹⁹ And finally, what makes this situation of the “Mizrahi” both unique and universal is its continuing relevance in illustrating the exigencies of similar displacements continuing into our times.

ENDNOTES

1. The Iraqi government headed by the prime minister Nuri Said (1888–1958) and in cooperation with the British government launched a “denaturalization” program for Iraqi Jews that stripped them of their Iraqi nationality and property rights, and gave them twelve months to leave the country. For more details see, Orit Bashkin’s *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).
2. Naqqash’s attachment to his birth country is seen not only in his fictional works, but also in nonfictional texts such as his literary essays and articles.
3. The Egyptian Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz (1911–2006) defined Naqqash as “one of the greatest living artists writing in Arabic today.” Ammiel Alcalay, *Keys to the Garden* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1996), 100.
4. In an interview with Naqqash, he commented on this point, stating “I feel discriminated against for a number of reasons; first, a Jew writing in Arabic is not read in Israel and gets no institutional support from the literary establishment.” For more details, see Alcalay, *Keys to the Garden*, 100.
5. Sablakh is the old name of the city Mahabad, which is situated in the north-west of Iran. Its importance came from the fact that it was the site where the People Republic of Kurdistan was first declared in 1946.
6. In this novel, the protagonist Shlomo takes the roles of the first and the second narrators simultaneously. Therefore, to steer away from the tangled subject of narrative techniques, which is not part of the essay’s thematic focus, and to avoid any confusion, it is preferred to use one term: “the protagonist.”
7. Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), 221.
8. Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity.” *New German Critique* 65, Cultural History/Cultural Studies (Spring–Summer, 1995), 125–126.
9. Maurice Halbwachs, *La Topographielégendaire des Évangiles en Terre sainte. Étude de mémoire collective* (Paris: Quadrige, 2008), 130.
10. Halbwachs speaks of “figures of memory” to mostly denote culturally formed, socially binding images; however, it is not only iconic but also narrative.
11. Samir Naqqash, *Shlomo al-Kurdiwa Ana waz-Zaman* (Cologne: Al-Kamel Verlag, 2004), 52. Further citations from the novel will be from this edition and only the page numbers will be mentioned within the body of the essay.
12. Rachel Elizabeth Green, *Towards a Poetics of the Black Hole: Trauma, Memory and Language in Samir Naqqash’s Shlomo Al-Kurdi, Myself and Time*. M.A. Thesis (Austin: University of Texas, 2013), 84.
13. Assmann and Czaplicka, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” 130.
14. Kosher is a kind of food that meets the Hebrew conditions of the permitted meal during the fasting period.
15. Kathryn Woodward, *Concepts of Identity and Difference* (London: Sage Publication, 1997), 30.
16. Philip Gleason, “Identifying Identity: A Semantic History.” *The Journal of American History* 69.4 (March 1983), 919.
17. Amin Maalouf, *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*. Trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Penguin Group, 2012), 4.
18. The literal meaning of “al-Kitani” is a person who trades in or deals with linen.
19. Alcalay, *Keys to the Garden*, ix.

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PART II

POSTCOLONIAL DESIRES



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CHAPTER FIVE

QUEERS IN-BETWEEN

Globalizing sexualities, local resistances



Abdulhamit Arvas

I

The 2012 Turkish movie *Zenne Dancer* (dir. Alpay and Binay) narrates the real-life story of Ahmet Yildiz, a Kurdish youth, who, at the age of 26, was shot dead allegedly by his father in Istanbul because of his aberrant sexual orientation.¹ Deriving from the Persian word *zen* [woman], and also evoking one of the historical characters appearing in Turkish theatrical shadow plays like *Karagoz* from the fifteenth century onwards, *zenne* refers to a man in drag; and today the word is used for campy male belly dancers in the Turkish language. The movie presents Ahmet and his *zenne* friend, Can, as victims of social, familial, and state violence. The story of the two “queer” men reaches its climax when they try to acquire an official exemption from their military service that is obligatory for all “healthy” males in Turkey.² For Can and Ahmet, there is only one possible way to avoid this service: undergoing an interview with military doctors to prove their “homosexuality” by adopting extremely flamboyant and feminine manners during the interview, and providing the military officials with photos of themselves having sex as evidence for their *pasif* [passive] sexual behavior.³ After being diagnosed as “psychosexually disordered” by the military doctors, and forced to come out to his father as *ibne*, the leading character Ahmet is shot dead by his father to save the honor (*namus*) of the family right before his European boyfriend Daniel was to “save” him by taking him to Europe.⁴

The movie not only evinces the everyday lives and struggles of queer people, but also invites us to consider the complexities of different queer subjectivities (i.e. *ibne*, *zenne*) that coexist simultaneously in contemporary Turkey. In this essay, I explore how these struggles and perceptions of sexual identities are interlinked with the historically changing sexual discourses as they have been shaped by state policies, nationalism, globalization, and westernization. Going back to the Ottoman modernization as the primary means of adopting western sexual identities in the nineteenth century, I propose to map out a genealogy of different sexual identities to better highlight indigenous terms, categories, and models as well as a blend of historical continuities and ruptures in Turkey.⁵ In the nineteenth century, there occurred an epistemological shift in Ottoman sexual attitudes by which the object of sexual intercourse gained

utmost significance with the adoption of western medical and moral discourses as a result of the process of westernization movements and modernization endeavors of the reformers, who were mostly educated in the European cosmopolitan centers. The newly introduced western conceptions of sexuality did not eradicate earlier conceptualizations, but merged with conventional understandings of sexuality in Ottoman Turkey. Hence two different sexual logics – psychosexual identities (European), and a penetration-based sexual matrix (Ottoman) – have since then coalesced into a hegemonic sexual discourse in contemporary Turkey that marginalizes all non-normative acts and subjects. Western sexual identities such as the homosexual, as mentioned above, traveled from Europe to Turkey, gaining a new momentum by amalgamating with already-existing categories and concepts. They crossed borders with their own epistemological luggage including medical, moral, psychological implications, and blended with indigenous identities and practices, be it cultural, social, performative, erotic, or sexual.

Contemporary films are interesting case studies because while they are mainly about the present, they nevertheless sharply illuminate these historical ruptures, shifts, and identity politics when placed in a historical context. They also show local resistances against as well as subversions of the hegemonic discourses. Ahmet's and Can's attachment with native categories like *zenne* and *ibne*, and their performance of the effeminate to get away with military service are exemplary in showing how modern western discourses are redeployed, twisted, and reused by queers for their own goals. While I focus particularly on the movie *Zenne* in this essay, I also trace numerous contemporary representations of queer people in film and literature within the Turkish context such as Kutlug Ataman's *Lola+Bididikid* (1999), Atif Yilmaz's *Gece, Melek ve Bizim Çocuklar* [*Night, Angel and Our Kids*] (1994), and Perihan Magden's recent novel, *Ali and Ramazan* (2010). In my exploration of these representations, I particularly underscore the specificities of sexual differences, sexual subjectivities, and their specific forms of historicity as I highlight the sexual conceptualizations and perceptions that resist the prevailing Euro-American sexual discourses based on identity categories in accordance with the sexual object choice (i.e. gay, lesbian).

Specifically, I focus on the Turkish experience of queer sexualities and their complex relationship to European history and to contemporary Euro-American discourses because Turkey stands out as a unique space that is *neither* a postcolonial state nor a European country. It is a space *in between* borders, be it national or geographical. It is at a geographical crossroads between the so-called East and West and between Middle-Eastern and European traditions, blurring the lines between these dichotomies. And while evoking the conditions of postcoloniality, these blurred lines probe conceptual borders between Islam and Christianity, local and global, colonizer and colonized, or for the focus of this essay, sexual identities and acts. Considering Turkish sexual culture and experience in terms of in-betweenness, therefore, disrupts such conceptual borders and dichotomous thinking.⁶ Furthermore, queerness located in in-betweenness can be productively investigated through the postcolonial concept of hybridity.⁷ Considering hybridity as operating on a theoretical and political level to challenge any national cultural hegemony in postcolonial contexts, William Spurlin astutely makes a connection between hybridity and queerness: "Hybridity, conceived as 'in-betweenness,' has particular relevance to queerness both as an intellectual strategy and as a political praxis since queerness disrupts and exceeds the coherence of

normative citizenship tied to the reproduction of heteronormative social relations.”⁸ Following this connection between hybridity and queerness, and locating queer in a hybrid space, I present queerness as a site of resistance to the Turkish national cultural hegemony that is maintained by the military enforcement of heteronormative nationalism.

Indeed like hybridity, queerness also challenges any stable borders and fixed sexual identities by stressing fluidity, both in concept and practice. As David Halperin defines, “Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence.”⁹ The queer resistance to stable sexual identification and the hybrid instability of a cultural and geographical belonging, therefore, productively bring together the postcolonial and the queer; *both* postcolonial theory and queer studies have challenged and expanded critical, cultural, and literary studies in the last few decades. Going back to poststructuralist and particularly Foucauldian methods of analyses, both schools of anti-foundational thought and criticism have questioned power relations by rendering as their object of analysis such notions as the state, nation, race, oppression, gender, and sexuality. Studying non-western sexualities, local, indigenous sexual subjectivities resisting western identity politics, and transnational interactions in varying sexual groups have revived sexuality studies as well as postcolonial approaches, especially in their intersections with transnational, diaspora, and globalization studies. While queer scholars started to trace how racial, colonial, and sexual discourses intersect, postcolonial scholars investigated sexual oppression and Eurocentric sexual transformations in postcolonial states by tracing, and oftentimes blurring, the lines between dichotomies like local/global, imported/indigenous, civilized/uncivilized, identity/act, and liberation/repression by providing different sexual epistemologies at work in colonized spaces.¹⁰ Furthermore, quite typically, in many of these works, transnational perspectives and comparative approaches that focus on the circulations, encounters, and movements of people, ideas, and discourses stand out as the significant modes of analyses.¹¹ Dennis Altman, for example, discusses how American sexual identities are in circulation in today’s globalizing world, and becoming global identities.¹² Elizabeth A. Povinelli and George Chauncey edited a special issue in 1999 on “Thinking Sexuality Transnationally” in *GLQ* proposing new ways of sexual analysis from a transnational lens that highlights transnational sexual movements and the effect of “translocal mobility” on sexual culture and histories of a given place.¹³ Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, in their “Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality” in *GLQ*, have suggested that western-born identities emerging from the colonial era became global in modernity, and highlighted the interactions and transformations in different sexual cultures when they come into contact.¹⁴ Most recently, Joseph Boone’s *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*, historicizing the significance of cross-cultural encounters and interactions in shaping sexual notions in Europe and the Middle East, demonstrates how sexualities circulate across borders. These transcultural queer approaches, therefore, propose to focus on circulating sexual identities/subjectivities beyond national borders and attest how transcultural influences operate in the formation of sexualities in any given context.¹⁵

While these scholars have stressed the significance of a transnational approach to sexuality studies and the effects of globalization on indigenous sexual cultures,

postcolonial critique has more specifically uncovered how imperialistic and neocolonial motivations operate in globalizing sexualities as a new form of cultural imperialism.¹⁶ Joseph Massad's *Desiring Arabs*, for example, is one such exemplary study that challenges orientalizing and exoticizing western approaches to Middle Eastern sexualities, and raises serious concerns against universalist LGBT activism in non-western societies. Exploring recent oppression of gay men in the Middle East, particularly the 2001 Queen Boat case in Egypt, Massad notes that there exists no "gay" identity in these cultures, and LGBT activism, or the "Gay International" as he calls it, transfers, in a colonizing move, European sexual identities to these societies without taking into consideration its negative oppressive effects. He states that

by inciting discourse on homosexual and gay and lesbian rights and identities, the epistemology, nay, the very ontology of gayness is instituted in such discourse, which could only have two reactions to the claims of universal gayness – support them or oppose them without ever questioning their epistemological underpinnings.¹⁷

Massad argues that imposing western sexual identities on other societies, wherein a gay or lesbian identity does not exist ontologically or epistemologically, destroys native sexual culture and practices in these places, and reduces them into certain sexual categorizations (i.e. gay). That reduction raises resistance in the native culture against those imported sexual categories; and hence the oppression and punishment of these persons identified as gay. The gay rights discourse of the "Gay International" to "liberate" Arabs from oppression is just another form of cultural imperialism (white man saving brown boys), for Massad.

While I agree with Massad that there are some LGBT groups or scholars who ignore cultural nuances and sensitivities by approaching Arab and Muslim queer subjects via essentialist, orientalist, and imperialist lenses, I must also add that we cannot see all "gay" and "lesbian" identities in these regions simply as an effect of neocolonial impositions of western sexual paradigms in orientalist terms. An individual's will to choose, identify, and desire cannot be ignored; claiming a West-originated identity is not simply a means of having complicity with the imperialist or the neocolonialist expectations and norms. It is worth noting that "the oppression and punishment of these persons identified as gay" is also a western practice that is adopted by the so-called East, and must be seen as a repressive, normalizing, non-native form of punishing non-normative sexual acts and desires, even while it may play out in different ways in the East and West. The homosexual is an adopted western notion, so too is homophobia. As Valerie Traub astutely puts in her critique of Massad, noting "the cultural imperialism implicit in any unidirectional importation of a conceptual apparatus derived largely from European and Anglo-American perspectives" should not lead to create absolute binaries that categorize and exclude sexually repressed people.¹⁸ Massad's analysis that ignores human agency and complexities of cross-cultural and transnational transferences thus risks generating another East/West binary. Strict dichotomies between the so-called East and West, as Spurlin reminds us,

[do] not entertain the possibilities of reciprocal interchange either in same-sex sexual relations between Arab Muslim men or as a more general form of cultural

mediation through international travel, the media, the internet, and social networking sites, the latter of which were key forms of communication and textual sites of the democratic struggle in the recent Arab Spring movements.¹⁹

Moreover, considering the long history of transcultural encounters and interactions, and the circulation of people and ideas between the two halves of the world, particularly in the Mediterranean, one cannot but ask, is there a native, pure, stable culture untouched by other cultures?

In his critique of Massad, Spurlin calls for a comparative approach that highlights the specificities and historicities of cultural and sexual differences:

Reading culture as circulatorial, and as always already relational and mediated, can help destabilize and queer fixed cultural identities and challenge national cultural hegemonies both in the West and in the postcolonial world, and expose new sites of heterogeneity and difference. Examining the spaces and the movements between national borders enables a tearing in the fabric of nationalism and new ways of exposing and loosening its hegemonic hold.²⁰

Spurlin resists an approach that analyzes indigenous sexual acts and subjectivities as self-contained and autonomous; instead, he stresses “relationality” as a more relevant and fruitful basis for analyzing sexual differences and the indigenous societies and cultures they emerge from. Similarly, in their introduction to *Cinsellik Muammasi: Türkiye’de Queer Kultur ve Muhalefet* [The Sexuality Conundrum: Queer Culture and Dissidence in Turkey], Cuneyt Cakirlar and Serkan Delice propose to revisit “queer analytics” as a response to Massad: “Queer goes beyond a monolithic East/West dichotomy. It makes it possible to rethink history(ies) of sexuality, to produce creative methodological approaches so as to understand relationality between local and global sexualities.”²¹ Queer, therefore, provides us tools to generate frameworks to work within without being trapped in a universalist vs. localist matrix. As regards rethinking histories of sexuality and reciprocities between cultures through a queer historicist methodology, Joseph Boone calls for a “contrapuntal” reading strategy that puts into dialogue sexual discourses from different spatial contexts to challenge the Orient/Occident divide.²² Such a method of analysis, Boone shows, illuminates the myriad forms of sexuality and eroticism in Europe and the Middle East that have contributed mutual constructions of sexualities in these spaces while simultaneously challenging ideologically created dichotomies.

Following these critical arguments about sexuality and eroticism as plural and transcultural, I attempt to historically map out indigenous sexual discourses in Turkey and how these discourses have shifted, and transformed into myriad forms as a result of westernization and flourishing nationalist discourses from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. In what follows, I particularly focus on the demarcation and interaction between discourses of sexuality as an identity depending on the sexual object-choice and sexuality as a hierarchy depending on active/passive or penetrator/penetrated dichotomy. And following Spurlin, I further stress the inevitability of a certain cross-pollination of influences between the East and the West in my exploration of contemporary representations of queer people in Turkey within a frame that observes the historical shifts and local specificities in their relation to

transnational, transcultural, and globalizing interactions. I suggest that the influence of Euro-American sexual notions is multi-faceted, going beyond neocolonial imposition, orientalist fantasizing, and globalizing imperatives. Sometimes these notions are adopted by the state and imposed on the people; other times these notions are claimed and deployed by queer people to resist and subvert hegemonic heteronormative repressions. Tracing the historical contexts henceforth reveals the shifting ideological dynamics of such transferences, which promises to productively intervene into the ongoing queer-postcolonial dialogue.

II

Exploring the historical shifts within changing perceptions of sexuality, scholars who work on Ottoman sexualities have depicted a sexual culture that liberally accommodated various forms of sexual acts and desires, and the expression of them – particularly same-sex male desire – in pre-modern Ottoman society. Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı's groundbreaking work, *The Age of Beloveds*, for example, presents a history of early modern Ottoman sexuality with a focus on contemporaneous European practices. They show that same-sex sexual practices were a part of the early modern Ottoman society, and that particularly, same-sex male love was the main trope in Ottoman literary works from the fifteenth to the late seventeenth century. As they state, "In Ottoman society, sexual or erotic relations between men and men and boys were seldom punished, especially if they were carried on in private."²³ So more than the sex of the sexual object choice, it was the sexual role that determined the societal norms of sexual relations:

in the patriarchal Ottoman society it was a given that older men should dominate young men and boys, a man could take the role of passive beloved in his youth and then, on being recognized as an adult (symbolized in the poetry by the growth of a full, dark beard), he could move into a dominant role without being stigmatized or censured in any way.²⁴

Similarly, Ze'evi posits that

the early Ottoman attitude to male "passive" intercourse was one of indifference as long as the hierarchy was sustained. This was some people's preference, it was part of the spectrum of normal sexual behavior, and it was not to be considered deviant in any way.²⁵

However, with the impact of westernization, this Ottoman sexual norm started to change in the nineteenth century.

Western medical discourses, which dissected sexual acts and desires, and thus led to the birth of "the homosexual" as a pathologized identity, were adopted by the Ottomans as a result of the westernization – and as some would consider a part of the colonial civilizing mission – movement in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁶ Thus ironically, mimicking the white male colonizer's dominant image, heterosexuality was now the norm. Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, a leader of the nineteenth century reforms, for

example, reports in his autobiographical *Ma'ruzat* that he writes for Sultan Abdulhamit II the salient change taking place in the moral conduct of people in 1850s:

As the number of women-lovers increased, that of boy-lovers decreased. It is as if the people of Sodom [the sodomites] disappeared off the face of the earth. The well-known love for and relationships with the young men in Istanbul has transformed to young women as *the natural order of things*. We don't see people like Kamil or Ali Pashas or those similar to them who were well known as boy-lovers in the higher offices. Yet, Ali Pasha had always tried to hide his love for boys because of the disapproval of the foreigners.²⁷

Cevdet Pasha acknowledges a shift in the sexual conducts of people, a move from same-sex relations to cross-sex ones, from homoeroticism to heteroeroticism in Istanbul, which he calls "the natural order of things." Cevdet Pasha's use of the order of things sets forth a categorization of sexualities by declaring procreative sex as natural and as the norm, hence identifying all non-procreative sexual inclinations as deviant.

This nineteenth century paradigm shift in sexual discourse generated selective integration of certain western discourses (sexual, gendered, racial) into the discourses of the westernizing state at the height of European colonialism. In the process of prompting this new "natural" order of things, textual materials that explicitly addressed matters related to sex such as dream interpretations, medical and legal texts, and shadow theaters, were all censored. Marriage and the family became institutionalized, and with a shifting emphasis on heteronormativity, literary representations now promoted monogamous heterosexuality.²⁸ By eradicating homoerotic friendship, affection and its affective expression – dominant in the pre-modern Ottoman culture – heteronormativity replaced the conventional homoerotic tone in literary works. Moreover, these changes suggested a desire not only to be like westerners, but also to be liked by westerners, as the second part of Cevdet Pasha's accounts strikingly shows: "Ali Pasha had always tried to hide his love for boys because of *the disapproval of the foreigners*." Ali Pasha's attempts to have his homoerotic affairs in secret to avoid the critique and disapproval of (western) foreigners – travelers, diplomats, ambassadors – indicates how the changes from a homoerotic to heteroerotic matrix also occurred on the level of collective self-fashioning as a result of interactions with the Europeans. Importantly, considering the colonial, orientalist European narratives that attributed sodomy and all other sexual deviances to the Ottomans from the sixteenth century onwards (a civilized, moral West vs. a backward, immoral East), we can see how the nineteenth century Ottomans were well aware of these stereotypical representations, and keeping their guard up under the European gaze in order to prove them wrong about their presumed sexual practices.²⁹ This self-transformation and auto-correction to avoid orientalist European lenses was most visible in the new Turkish republic that defined itself as a western, civilized, modern, and national state in contrast to the backward Ottoman past. Indeed, heterosexualization reached its peak with the newly born nation-state Turkish Republic's nationalist discourses of sexuality, which attributed all non-normative sexualities to the imperial "perverted" Ottomans the way orientalist Europeans had done.³⁰

Interestingly, rather than predominantly a colonial or imperialistic imposition by the West, this history of changing sexual discourses suggests that the changes taking place in Turkey were also self-imposing, and consistent and concurrent with widespread indigenous cultural concepts and trends. As Spurlin persuasively states,

just as the self is bound, indeed formed, by social, ideological and historical constraints, no cultural or national identity, as part of its movement through history, can exist untouched by the circulation of cultures, presently occurring at increasingly higher speeds across the globe.³¹

In this circulation, the imported concept or identity, I would argue, fuses with native ones and attains new significations. As I discuss in regards to the contemporary Turkish movies in the following part, *homoseksualite* was imported into Turkey as a pathological notion, yet has been applied only to the passive party in accordance with conventional, traditional (Turkish) sexual culture. And as I discussed elsewhere, parallel to the European experience that built the abnormal pathologized homosexual identity upon older categories of sodomite, catamite, or effeminate, Turkish discourses adopted the homosexual as a new category blending it with older categories like *gulampare* (boy-lover), and *ibne*.³² Subjectivities like *zenne*, *ibne* are now medically *the homosexual*, while the penetrating party in male–male relations has remained the normal in a temporal phase.

III

Adopting European medical discourses and sexual identities and conflating them with varying indigenous sexual categories, from the nineteenth century onwards, the contemporary nationalist hegemonic discourse in Turkey still sustains the conventional sexual matrix of penetrating/penetrated to identify deviant, unhealthy men. In the Turkish experience with modern sexual discourses, the military state has been instrumental in pathologizing and rejecting non-normative sexualities. As the militarist practice evinces in the movie *Zenne*, the determining factor for *homoseksualite* is not identity, or self-identification, but the *pasif* sexual role in a sexual act. The movie *Zenne* strikingly illustrates how sexual identities and discourses are intricately interlinked with Turkish traditions, history, and state policies as well as interactions with the West in this geography. It also shows how young queers in Turkey subvert the hegemonic understanding of sexuality for their own goals by performing these identities the way they are conceived by the state.

The main tension in the movie is produced by the state's intervention via military apparatuses into the protagonists' sexual lives. Ahmet is about to graduate from college, and like all young Turkish men, he has to serve in the military. Yet Ahmet does not want to serve in the military, and he uses "homosexuality," as one of the few ways possible to be exempt from this service, to avoid the military service. In so doing, he needs to prove his homosexuality by completing two steps: posing for a photo while being anally penetrated, and acting in a feminine way. It is obvious that the military, and thus the state, perception of homosexuality – and therefore unhealthy sexuality – is restricted to bottoming effeminate males. Homosexual deviance is thus constituted by the combination of sexual perversion (passive) and gender inversion (feminine).

Feeling humiliated, Ahmet wants his German lover – a photographer, who is aware of Ahmet’s familial oppression and willing to take him to Europe – to photograph him having sex so that he can use these pictures as evidence of his “unhealthy sexuality.” To this end, he transforms his “bear” look into an effeminate one with flamboyant manners and pink jeans. Ahmet plays according to the rules, confirms, and subverts the homosexual identity that the military doctors have in mind for his own goal by easily fashioning himself. He temporarily adopts the very same traits that the militaristic state attributes to the homosexual. He becomes the homosexual that they know of when they see him – *pasif* and feminine. Ahmet therefore succeeds in obtaining an exemption from military service, but as a result of this process, he is publicly “outed” as *ibne*.

Left with no other option, he comes out to his father, crying: “İbneyim babo!” [I am *ibne*, Dad]. Ahmet’s coming out as “*ibne*” also elicits how act-based and identity-based notions of sexuality are conflated into one another. A derogatory slang term of identification (like “faggot”), *ibne* is only used to refer to those male individuals who adopt the receptive role in anal intercourse with other men. More recently, *ibne* has been reclaimed as an identity category by queer people in Turkey.³³ Derived from the medieval notion of *ubna* (unhealthy males who desire to be penetrated by other men), *ibne* uneasily blends sexuality-as-orientation (Ahmet’s coming out), based on the sexual object-choice, with sexuality-as-hierarchy, based on active/passive roles (military perception). *Ibne*, therefore, amalgamates an Arabic-originated word and signification (*ubna*/passive) with a European term and connotation (homosexual/psychosexual identity).³⁴ For the military, Ahmet is considered “homosexual” – unhealthy and effeminate – only when he proves to be penetrated anally. However, a man who is *aktif* [active, top] during sex with another man is not considered as ineligible to do military service as a homosexual man, but is perceived as a healthy man in a temporary homosexual space to be straightened up during the military service.³⁵

More specifically, the *mise-en-scène* during the interview with the military physicians is telling as regards the humiliation imposed on Ahmet by the doctors as well as their utterance of what it is means to be a “man.” When they ask Ahmet what his occupation is, he replies that he is a *zenne* (although we know he is not, but he knows *zenne* will easily be associated with homosexuality), upon which one of the doctors provokes: “Would a real man [*erkek adam*] dance, boy?” Following this evocation of what “a real man” is comes the scene in which they look at the sexual photographs of Ahmet: The camera focuses on their faces, reflecting their disgust as well as amusement. Seeing the photographs, they approve his exemption at once. The military oppression over sexually marginalized people presented by these scenes shows the extent to which the nationalist Turkish discourse of military service is sexualized and gendered.³⁶ Military space becomes an arena to determine what is normal, to mark the penetrated party as unhealthy, and to straighten up those who are not homosexual enough (i.e. *aktif*). Also, the medical aspect attached to this military vision (the military officers diagnosing homosexuality as a disorder are also medical doctors in the army) reflects the medical pathologization of (homo)sexuality that Michel Foucault explores in *The History of Sexuality*. Referring to the West in the nineteenth century, Michel Foucault points out, “the homosexual was now a species.”³⁷ Foucault and other social constructivists investigated the birth of homosexuality, as we

know it today, and have posited that “the homosexual” as an identity, and thus a homo/hetero binary, is a modern bourgeois concept.³⁸ Of course what constituted this modern sexuality is *scientia sexualis* of the nineteenth century, generated by writings of sexologists such as *Psychopathia Sexualis* by Richard von Krafft-Ebbing, which pathologized and gave birth to conceptualizations of psychosexual orientations.³⁹

As the movie illustrates, homosexuality as an aberrant, pathologized form of sexuality is still perceived as a medical disorder today by the militaristic nationalist cultural hegemony, though this understanding of sexuality differs from and complicates the post-nineteenth century western conceptions by attaching homosexuality, in accordance with conventional penetration-based sexual culture, to acts rather than desire, and to a single sexual role, *pasif* (bottom). The movie, therefore, highlights the military and medical perception of the homosexual as flamboyant, feminine, and bottom/passive in accordance with the mainstream public perception of *ibne*. It also displays that the state’s perception of homosexuality depends on the framework in which a man may reject a homosexual identity and be considered “healthy” as long as he is the penetrator; hence, the coexistence of western medical categorization (homo/hetero) and conventional, traditional sexual conceptions (active/passive).

As many other contemporary queer representations show, the active/passive matrix does not solely function in military spaces. Many individuals internalize this matrix, and resist any form of sexual identification be it because of an internalized heteronormativity, or non-identitarian conceptualization of sexuality. Kutlug Ataman’s *Lola+Bilidikid*, a German-Turkish co-production, for example, addresses complex queer subjectivities in immigrant Turkish communities in Germany while presenting varying Turkish approaches to same-sex sexual relations.⁴⁰ The main character Billy the Kid (*Bilidikid*) is a rent boy, a hustler having sex with men for money. Despite having a love relationship with another man, Lola, who cross-dresses for drag shows, Billy resists a sexual identity. He wants Lola to undergo a sex change operation, to be a “woman” so that they can have a happy family away from public surveillance. When Lola protests by saying “Why can’t we be happy as we are” and asks him why Billy himself does not undergo a sex change operation, he replies, “because I am man, you are not.” Billy’s understanding of sexuality is simply based on a sexual hierarchy of the dominating and the dominated, and a gendered matrix of man/woman. As long as he is the penetrating one, the penetrated is simply a “woman,” or in Lola’s case, a woman in a male body. This is his first advice when he meets Murat, Lola’s younger gay brother: “Kestaneyi çizdirme, tamam mı?” [Do not get your ass fucked, ok?]. Murat should never confess it to others even if he feels he is gay, says Billy. A man is still a man no matter where he puts “it” (his penis) in, he advises. Billy’s addressing Lola as wife/woman fits into the hegemonic discourse of gender-based sex as we see in *Zenne*. Yet although Billy seems to internalize heteronormativity, his having sex with other men for money, his sincere friendship with other sexually transgressive individuals, a desire to live a life with Lola (which means to dream of a nuclear family with children), and his passionate love for him/her altogether create a challenge to enforced heteronormativity as well. As an immigrant minority from a lower class, Billy uses a gender-based discourse as a reaction to identitarian European policies.

The active/passive demarcation, Billy makes, is actually a common trope in many other Turkish filmic representations as well. The movie *Gece, Melek ve Bizim Çocuklar* [*Night, Angel and Our Kids*] by Atif Yılmaz, shows a similar tension between

Hakan, a hustler, and Serap, a female prostitute.⁴¹ Hakan's articulation of disgust for queer people early in the movie is later contrasted with his own sexual adventures with other men for money. Hakan's approach to sex and sexuality seems to be similar to Billy's. Likewise, in Perihan Magden's recent novel, *Ali and Ramazan*, Ramazan's passionate love for his best friend and lover Ali, or the sexual acts he partakes in with other men for money, is not enough for him to attach himself to a sexual orientation.⁴² These examples from recent gay-themed Turkish representations demonstrate how the military, the state, and the public perception of sexuality is internalized by individuals, and how some people just resist being identified as *gey*, *ibne*, or *homoseksuel*. This is indeed a serious caution against tendencies to describe these subjects as "gay" because in none of these representations do we hear the word "gay," though the term "gay" has entered in the Turkish language as "gey" for self-identified male homosexuals. These characters (apart from Ahmet of *Zenne*) also reject the label *ibne* because it is stigmatized and attached to the penetrated party. All these representations reflect the fact that anal passivity and femininity are stigmatized and forced to concealment with suppression and prevention. However, Ahmet's coming out as *ibne*, and Can's identification as *zenne* in *Zenne* probes this simplistic matrix, and forces us to consider the nuances of these categories.

As scholars working on Turkish homosexualities have shown, there is no single form of homosexuality.⁴³ Men like Billy, Hakan, and Ramazan, who have sex with other men but resist a sexual identification, be it because of societal repression, heteronormativity, or lack of identity-based conceptualization, are all a part of queer sexualities in contemporary Turkey. While in many suburban places or conservative communities, an active/passive model without psychosexual identities is dominant, nonetheless, *gey* appears as a popular identity category particularly among more educated, westernized, hybrid urban communities.⁴⁴ In urban centers LGBT communities have become more visible by producing publications, forming organizations, actively engaging in politics, and organizing Euro-American style pride events with thousands of attendees every year in Turkey.⁴⁵ Also, as *Zenne* shows, more historical categories like *zenne* are still alive in social life. As Eve Sedgwick asserts, referring to Euro-American sexualities, earlier sexual categories (re)appear within the new ones with "the unrationalized coexistence of different models during the times they coexist."⁴⁶ Indeed, when we focus on "the unrationalized coexistence" of all these forms of sexualities in Turkey, we can see how the traditional models are blended with contemporary Euro-American forms of sexuality and heteronormativity.

A country with European, Asian, and Middle Eastern influences, engaging with western colonial influences but remaining outside European rule, queer Turkish history provides a unique lens on this complex network of influences. For instance, it calls us to account for western constructions of sexuality as *well* as indigenous re-workings and redeployments of and resistances to western sexual categories and forms of (sexual) identities. Therefore when locating the homo/hetero distinction and the emergence of "the homosexual" in West, we should also consider that *not* all sexual identities are rooted in the West and that non-western societies have long histories of complex negotiations with western sexual discourses and categories. Realizing native, indigenous categories and highlighting them in relation to their convergence with western sexual identities is a means to generate a queer resistance to the national cultural hegemony that sees same-sex expressions and practices as aberrant forms of

Euro-American immorality and wickedness. By putting *zenne* and *ibne* at its center, the movie *Zenne*, therefore, creates such a resistance by inviting its audience to place these subjectivities in complex native cultural contexts rather than seeing them all as western homosexuals. Thus, to sum up, in these representations, we can see how sexuality is a historical construct that shifts in accordance with state politics and power dynamics, and yet always in flux, crossing boundaries of the national and transnational, of Ottoman and western, and East and West.

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ENDNOTES

1. *Zenne Dancer*, dir. Caner Alpay and Mehmet Binay (Cam Films, 2012).
2. I am using the word “queer” in this essay as an analytical term to refer to transgressive sexual identities and acts for convenience. The use of this term does not mean refusal or ignorance of LGBT-I identities. Queer as a theoretical concept has long been embraced by Turkish queer academics and activists. As early as 2004, Bogazici University in Istanbul hosted “Queer, Turkey and Identity” conference that brought together academics, students, and activists to create a platform to discuss queer theory and approaches in Turkish context. For more on the deployment of queer and queer culture and dissidence in Turkey, see Cuneyt Cakirlar and Serkan Delice, eds., *Cinsellik Muammasi: Turkiye’de Queer Kultur ve Muhalefet* [The Sexuality Conundrum: Queer Culture and Dissidence in Turkey] (Istanbul: Metis, 2012).
3. I stress active/passive differentiation by using Turkish terms *aktif/pasif* in order to underscore that these terms are used by some individuals to define their sexual orientation. For various other identity terms such as *labunya*, *laço* that are popular among queer people who do not use gay or homosexual as an identification, see Tarik Bereket and Barry D. Adam, “The Emergence of Gay Identities in Contemporary Turkey.” *Sexualities* 9.2 (2006): 131–151.
4. Daniel’s desire to “save” Ahmet by taking him to Germany hints the colonial move of the white man’s saving the native. Ahmet’s first resistance to this invitation by saying “What am I going to do in Germany, Daniel” is a counter-move presenting his desire to stay in his native land. But the danger of losing his life, and the familial oppression pushes him to decide to join Daniel in his trip to Germany. The movie creates a desire for spectators to see him to be saved; but he is shot right before he leaves. A similar European man–Turkish man relation is pervasive in other queer representations as well. In Ferhan Özpetek’s 1997 film *Hamam* [Turkish Bath], for example, a married Italian man explores his homosexuality/bisexuality with a Turkish boy in a *hamam* [bathhouse] in Istanbul. For more information on the homoerotics of orientalism and queer explorations in the East, see Joseph Boone, “Vacation Cruises: or The Homoerotics of Orientalism.” *PMLA* 110.1 (1995): 89–107.
5. Here I follow the model offered by David Halperin in his *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002). As a response to Eve Sedgwick’s critique of the essentialism vs. social constructivism dichotomy in sexuality studies, Halperin proposes to inquire into the construction of sexual identities before the emergence of sexual orientations and to do this *without* recurring necessarily

- to modern notions of “sexuality” or sexual orientation. For Halperin, tracing a genealogy of sexual identities and practices as well as shifting sexual discourses historically would defamiliarize the homo/hetero demarcation and open up new spaces to understand the construction of modern sexual identities.
6. For more on borders, border crossings, and gender interrelations, see Jane Aaron, Henrice Altink, and Chris Weedon, eds., *Gendering Border Studies* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010); Eithne Luibheid and Lionel Cantu, eds., *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2000).
 7. For more on hybridity, see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). On hybrid and diasporic identities, see Arif Dirlik, “Bringing History Back In: Of Diasporas, Hybridities, Places, and Histories.” In *Beyond Dichotomies: Histories, Identities, Cultures, and the Challenge of Globalization*, ed. Elisabeth Mubimbe-Boyi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 93–127.
 8. William Spurlin, “Sexual/Cultural Hybridity in the ‘New’ South Africa: Emergent Sites of Transnational Queer Politics.” In *Gendering Border Studies*, ed. Jane Aaron, Henrice Altink, and Chris Weedon (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), 208–221.
 9. David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 62.
 10. Some exemplary works that extend the geographical boundaries of postcolonial and queer approaches by tracing globalization, transnationalism, and sexuality are Jasbir Puar, “Global Circuits: Transnational Sexualities and Trinidad.” *Signs* 26 (2001): 1039–1065; Phillip Brian Harper, Anne McClintock, José Esteban Muñoz and Trish Rosen, eds. *Queer Transxions of Race, Nation, and Gender*. Special Issue of *Social Text* 52–53 (1997); Engin F. Isin and Patricia K. Wood, *Citizenship and Identity* (London: Sage, 1999); Jon Binnie, *Globalization of Sexuality* (London: Sage Publication, 2004); John Champagne, “Transnationally Queer? A Prolegomenon.” *Socialist Review* 27.1/2 (1999): 143–164; Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV, eds., *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Saskia E. Wieringa, Evelyn Blackwood, and Abha Bhaiya, eds., *Women’s Sexualities and Masculinities in a Globalizing Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi, eds., *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997); Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Martin F. Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Cindy Patton and Benigno Sanchez-Eppler, eds., *Queer Diasporas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Eng-Beng Lim, *Brown Boys and Rice Queens: Spellbinding Performance in the Asias* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); John C. Hawley, ed., *Post-Colonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Jarrod Hayes, Margaret Higonnet, and William Spurlin, eds., *Comparatively Queer: Interrogating Identities across Time, Crossing Cultures* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), among many others.
 11. Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani note that transnationalism “focuses on various flows and counterflows and multi-striated connections they give rise to” (4). For more on transnationalism and diaspora studies, see Quayson and Daswani, *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2013); Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2003).
 12. Dennis Altman, “Rupture or Continuity?: The Internalization of Gay Identities.” *Social Text* 48.14.3 (1996): 77–94.

13. Elizabeth A. Povinelli and George Chauncey, "Thinking Sexuality Transnationally: An Introduction." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 5.4 (1999): 439–450.
14. Grewal Inderpal and Caren Kaplan, "Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 7.4 (2001): 663–679.
15. Joseph Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
16. For more on the orientalist, colonial, and racial discourses as they intersect with sexual politics, see Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and Jose Esteban Munoz, "Introduction, What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" *Social Text* 23.3–4 (2005): 1–17; Boone, "Vacation Cruises"; William Spurlin, *Imperialism within the Margins: Queer Representations and the Politics of Culture in South Africa* (New York: Palgrave, 2006); Jarrod Hayes, *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Eng-Beng Lim, *Brown Boys and Rice Queens*; Anjali Arondekar, "Border/line Sex: Queer Postcolonialities, or How Race Matters Outside the United States." *Interventions* 7.2 (2005): 236–250.
17. Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 174.
18. Valerie Traub, "The Past Is a Foreign Country? The Times and Spaces of Islamicate Sexuality Studies." In *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations Across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, ed. Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 1–40, 14.
19. William J. Spurlin, "Shifting Geopolitical Borders/Shifting Sexual Borders: Textual and Cultural Renegotiations of National Identity and Sexual Dissidence in Postcolonial Africa." *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 13.1 (2013): 69–79, 75.
20. *Ibid.*, 73.
21. *Ibid.*, 27
22. Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*.
23. Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 80.
24. *Ibid.*, 49
25. Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500–1900* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2006), 39. For overviews on early modern Ottoman sexualities, see Irvin Cemil Schick, "Representation of Gender and Sexuality in Ottoman and Turkish Erotic Literature." *Turkish Studies Association Journal* 28.1–2 (2007): 81–103; Abdulhamit Arvas, "From the Pervert Back to the Beloved: Homosexuality and Ottoman Literary History, 1453–1923." In *Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. Ellen McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 145–163.
26. This changing sexual discourse can be observed in other Islamicate societies. As Leslie Peirce asserts in her essay on Middle Eastern sexuality studies, "the impact of the West on nineteenth-century Middle Eastern society is undeniable, whether by force of intellectual inspiration and imperialist aura or on the ground in the form of colonial administrators, missionaries, commercial agents, governesses, young Muslims returning from European educations, and so on." ("Writing Histories of Sexuality in the Middle East." *The American Historical Review* 114.5 (2009): 1325–1339, 1336). Najmabadi's description of nineteenth century Iran shows similarities with the Ottomans in the process of building a nation-state through a new sexual discourse. For a history of sexuality and the changing discourses in Arabic speaking regions under the Ottoman Empire, see Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian*

- Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 2005).
27. Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Ma'ruzât*. Ed. Yusuf Halacoglu (Istanbul: Cagri, 1980), 9, my translation.
 28. See Ze'evi's excellent overview on medical, religious, and legal as well as theatrical changes. For more on heterosexualization in the process of modernization, see Deniz Kandiyoti, "Some Awkward Questions on Women and Modernity in Turkey." In *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 270–287; Deniz Kandiyoti, "Patterns of Patriarchy: Notes for an Analysis of Male Dominance in Turkish Society." In *Women in Modern Turkish Society: A Reader*, ed. Sirin Tekeli (London and New Jersey: Zed, 1991), 306–318; Deniz Kandiyoti, "Gendering the Modern: On Missing Dimensions in the Study of Turkish Modernity." In *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. Sibel Bozdoğan and Resat Kasaba (Seattle and London: University of Washington, 1997), 133–156.
 29. Some exemplary early modern accounts that attribute sodomy to the Ottomans are Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of Ottoman Empire* (1668; New York: Arno, 1971); Paulus Gouius, *A Shorte Treatise upon the Turkes Chronicles* (London, 1546); Sir Henry Blunt, *A Voyage Into the Levant: Being a Brief Relation of a Journey Lately Performed from England . . . With Particular Observations Concerning the Modern Condition of the Turks* (London, 1634); George Sandes, *A Relation of a Journey* (London, 1615). For more on history of encounters and interactions between Europe and the Ottoman Empire, attributing sexual deviance to the Ottomans as a trope, see Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*; Goran V. Stanivukovic, "Cruising the Mediterranean: Narratives of Sexuality and Geographies of the Eastern Mediterranean in Early Modern English Prose Romances." In *Remapping the Mediterranean World in Early Modern English Writing*, ed. Goran V. Stanivukovic (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 59–74; Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theatre in the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570–1630* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003); Gerald Maclean, *The Rise of Oriental Travels: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580–1720* (New York: Palgrave, 2004); Gerald Maclean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579–1624* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), among others.
 30. A good example to this policy would be Ismet Zeki Eyuboglu's *Divan Şiirinde Sapık Sevgi* [Pervert Love in Divan Poetry] (Istanbul: Okat, 1968), which in accordance with Republican condemnation of the Ottomans as perverts, uncovers the homoerotic nature of Ottoman literary tradition to claim how deviant the Ottomans were as opposed to the new secular, moral, and heterosexual Republic.
 31. Spurlin, "Sexual/Cultural Hybridity in the 'New' South Africa," 210.
 32. Arvas, "From the Pervert Back to the Beloved."
 33. See endnote 45 on the slogan, "Velev ki ibneyiz."
 34. For more on *ubna* as a medical sexual category in the medieval Islamic societies, see Ze'evi, *Producing Desire*, and El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in Arab-Islamic World*.
 35. News about the existence of this military practice was announced to the world by the German magazine *Der Spiegel* (<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/a-726903.html>) but the army renounced them (http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/haber_yalanlandi_dunyanin_en_buyuk_gay_porno_arsivi_tskda_degil-1028864). However, many people narrating their experiences prove the otherwise: According to their narratives, the military considers homosexuality as a temporal space and the exemption report is delayed till it is certain that the person is irrecoverably homosexual; thus the diagnosis is "*homoseksualite*," a psychosexual

- disorder. Some questions they are asked during the interview are whether the person is effeminate, playing with girls when they were kids, ever been with a woman; and see if the person can be “converted” and straightened up; and sometimes the army officers try military psychiatry cells called “pembe kogus” [pink cell] to “treat” *homoseksualite*. In the process of one’s proving his homosexuality, family members are informed, which forces these people to come out. See some of these interviews: http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/diger/335136/_Pembe_tezkere_ye_kogus_iskencesi.html; <http://www.mynet.com/haber/yasam/uc-escinsel-gencin-pembe-teskere-hikayesi-467120-1>; “Top Var, Tüfek Var, Trans Yok!” <http://www.kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=9147>; “Rapor Sürecinde Zaten Eşcinsel Olduğunuzu Unutmayın!” <http://www.kaosgl.com/sayfa.php?id=15043>
36. Military service is, for example, a man’s honor (*namus*) in public discourse just like a wife or sister is considered as an honor to him. This discourse genders the “motherland” and the country as female to be protected by healthy males. For more on the military in the nationalist discourse and the gender dynamics in Turkey, see Ayse Gul Altinay, *The Myth of the Military-Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
 37. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage 1978), 43.
 38. Mary McIntosh, “Homosexual Role.” *Social Problems* 16.2 (1968): 182–192; Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Quartet, 1997); David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Halperin, *Saint Foucault*; Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); Arnold Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).
 39. Richard von Krafft-Ebbing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Trans. Franklin S. Klaf (New York: Arcade, 2011).
 40. Kutlug Ataman, dir. *Lola+Bilidikid* (Boje Buck, 1999).
 41. Atif Yilmaz, dir. *Gece, Melek ve Bizim Çocuklar* (Yesilcam Film, 1993).
 42. Perihan Magden, *Ali ile Ramazan* (Istanbul: Dogan Kitap, 2010). On queerness of “rent boys” of Istanbul, see Cenk Ozbay’s essay, “Rent Boy’ların Queer Oznelligi: Istanbul’da Norm Karsiti Zaman, Mekan, Cinsellik ve Sinifsallik” [Queer Subjectivities of Rent Boys: Non-Normative Time, Space, Sexuality and Class]. In Cakirlar and Delice, *Cinsellik Muammasi*, 280–300.
 43. For more on contemporary queer culture in Turkey, see Hüseyin Taping, “Masculinity, and Turkish Male Homosexuality.” In *Modern Homosexualities: Fragments of Lesbian and gay Experiences*, ed. Ken Plummer (London: Routledge, 1992), 39–49; Bereket and Adam, “The Emergence of Gay Identities”; Serkan Gorkemli, “‘Coming Out of the Internet’: Lesbian and Gay Activism and the Internet as a ‘Digital Closet’ in Turkey.” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 8.3 (2012): 63–88; Arslan Yüzgün, “Homosexuality and Police Terror in Turkey.” *Journal of Homosexuality* 249.3–4 (1993): 159–169.
 44. See Gul Ozyegin, “Reading the Closet Through Connectivity.” *Social Identities: Journal for the Studies of Race, Nation and Culture* 18.2 (2012): 201–222; Haktan Ural, *Construction of Gay Identity Among Different Classes: A Case Study in Ankara*. Unpublished Master’s Thesis. Middle East Technical University, 2010.
 45. Forming homosexual groups and political sexual activism goes back to the 1970s. LGBT organizations were formed especially on university campuses in 1990s when *gey* as an identification term started to be popular as well. For more on LGBT movements in Turkey, see Taping, “Masculinity, and Turkish Male Homosexuality”; Gorkemli, “‘Coming Out of the Internet’”; and essays, particularly Erdal Partog’s chapter in Cakirlar and Delice, *Cinsellik Muammasi*. Interestingly one of the slogans that became famous during the

more recent LGBT rallies in Turkey is “Velev ki ibneyiz” [Suppose we are *ibne*, so what?], which shows how homosexual people claim *ibne* to define themselves while subverting its derogatory implications.

46. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2008), 47.

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CHAPTER SIX

MORALITY AND DESIRE

The role of the “Westernized” woman in post-independence Pakistani cinema

—♦—
Sadaf Ahmad

Jameel, played by actor Waheed Murad and one of the male protagonists of the 1975 hit *Mohabbat Zindagee Hai* [*Love Is Life*], sings of his leaving Eastern ways and adopting Western ones as he sings *mashraqi rang ko chor kai, maghrabi rang apna liya*.¹ He is concerned with his fiancée’s turn to a *maghrabi* or “Western”² life-style and this song is a part of his larger mission to cure her of her alleged wayward ways so that she may embody desirable “Eastern” virtues once again.

The *maghrabzada* or Westernized woman – a Pakistani woman who embodies Western values and characteristics – has manifested herself through different kinds of characters in Pakistani films since the nation’s creation in 1947. The vamp and cabaret dancer are her earliest incarnations and can be seen in films in the postcolonial era as early as the 1950s. The *maghrabzada* women in Pakistani films produced in the 1970s, however, were not the vamps and cabaret dancers of the prior decades. While they shared some similarity in terms of looks, values, and behavior, they were demonized in a way that they were not earlier and they came to embody and represent immorality and were portrayed as a threat to the family and to social order.

I suggest that the trope of the *maghrabzada* woman in Pakistani films of the 1970s intersects with the presence of a similar and an increasingly ubiquitous trope of the Western woman in public consciousness in that time period, one which came into being as a result of a historical process that has its roots in colonial India. Maulana Sayyid Abu’l Ala Mawdudi (1903–1979), a religious reformer and founder of the *Jama’at-i-Islami*, developed this trope in Northern India in the early twentieth century, when the Indian subcontinent was still under British colonial rule.³ His Occidental discourse of the West and Western women and the essentialist images that he produced came into being through the colonial encounter and originally aimed to provide Muslims with an Other that could be used to illustrate what was wrong with the West, and to inform Muslims (and especially Muslim women) of how they ought to behave in contrast.

However, once made, representations can be challenged, altered, or be used for entirely different purposes. Thus on the one hand, the filmmakers of the 1970s also drew upon essentialized images of the West and *maghrabzada* women, which had become ubiquitous in public by that time, for the same purpose, namely, to illustrate

the dangers that befell those who adopted Western, a.k.a. “immoral” values and lifestyle. They evoked associations between similar negative images of supposedly decadent Westernized women produced by Mawdudi earlier. But this was not the only reason these images were deployed by filmmakers. Homi Bhaba has spoken of the Other being “at once an object of desire and derision” in colonial discourse and it is tempting to read something similar in the Occidental discourse, as the Other looks back.⁴ Such derision is necessary to protect one’s culture and tradition. At the same time, the moral discourse can be perceived as a cover that hides the fascination, the desire for the other. Pakistani filmmakers were interested in providing their audience with drama and entertainment and the *maghrabzada* woman, who was vivacious and exciting, was used to provide this entertainment and satisfy the male gaze even as she was derided for doing so.

Nevertheless, while it is tempting to view the *maghrabzada* woman as an object of both desire and derision because of her status in terms of alterity and otherness, a closer look at the manner in which female protagonists have been represented in the 1980s and beyond strongly suggests that the audience’s potential desire for a *maghrabzada* woman has less to do with her being *maghrabzada* and more to do with her being able to embody an overt sexuality, which she could do so because of her status as a Westernized other. However, this embodiment did not remain her sole domain in the 1980s and, quite strikingly, we soon begin seeing her character disappear from films.

I use this chapter to examine the *maghrabzada* woman’s *changing* depiction in Pakistani cinema and argue that colonialism’s legacy, tied to the very existence of the nation itself and responsible for many contemporary social structures and aspects of both material and non-material culture, is neither comprehensive nor absolute. In this context, the images of the stereotypical Western Other that were forged in a colonial context had a limited utility in postcolonial Pakistani cinema – a cinema that cannot strictly be framed as “postcolonial” in any unequivocal sense. While appropriate as a temporal category, its use as a primary framework or lens through which to understand the nature of Pakistani cinema in general, or the *maghrabzada* woman in specific, hides more than it reveals. Therefore, in my approach I move beyond a colonial/postcolonial binary and instead examine the *maghrabzada* woman through more complex discursive genealogies and influences, which may have little to nothing to do with the initial colonial encounter, even when the depiction itself may be initially rooted within it.

In order to unpack the points mentioned above, I begin this chapter by providing a brief overview of how Maulana Mawdudi’s concern for the Muslim predicament in colonial India eventually led to his generating a reified image of an immoral West; in doing so, I wish to illustrate the manner in which he repeatedly used this imagery to highlight the dangers of upholding allegedly Western values. I then underline the similarities in how both he and the Pakistani films produced in the 1970s conceived the *maghrabzada* woman – as a shameless, immoral person who could destroy families and create havoc in society – and used her as a pedagogical device. Thus in the subsequent section, I suggest that this character’s conception and presence in films of the 1970s is directly related to the *Jama‘at-i-Islami*’s success in popularizing Mawdudi’s discourse within society by that time, and that the discourse that was forged through a colonial encounter continued to be invoked to serve a patriarchal

agenda – an agenda that revolved around controlling women’s independence and sexuality, while simultaneously presenting them as objects of desire. However, I conclude this chapter by drawing upon the changes the film industry went through and this character’s subsequent disappearance in films, revealing in turn the limits of a post-colonial analytical lens, especially as offering a temporal perspective. I suggest that a holistic analysis that pays attention to temporal changes and multiple influences across a range of social domains, and recognizes the varying impact a discourse can have across different social sectors, leads to a more complex and nuanced understanding of the active forces within the society of the subcontinent.

MAULANA MAWDUDI AND WESTERN WOMEN

Partha Chatterjee argues that Bengali literature (mainly by Hindu authors) was rife with “gross caricatures” of European influenced Bengali women in the nineteenth century, when the Indian subcontinent was under British colonial rule.⁵ These highly mocked images of the so-called Westernized women had little basis in reality, but were creations that attempted to discourage women from taking up alien behaviors. The Muslims in Northern India, however, were more diverse in terms of how they viewed European women as they carried out their respective reform movements. Barbara Metcalf puts these reform movements in three categories – the *ulema* or religious scholars, the social reformers, and the Islamists.⁶

The *ulema* of the late nineteenth century, such as Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, were interested in “secur[ing] a better moral and material life for women and their families” and they wrote about the importance of women’s literacy, their religious knowledge, and their ability to carry out a range of responsibilities in their religious writings.⁷ This discourse, however, developed “largely independent of any engagement with European critiques of Indian women and they did not define themselves by either emulating or opposing a European pattern.”⁸ European women were completely ignored in this discourse. The social reformers, such as Sayyid Mumtaz Ali and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, were also interested in female education and securing greater rights for Muslim women. However, unlike the *ulema*, they idealized European women’s educated status and also focused on issues such as polygamy and purdah. This often resulted in their being called “colonial collaborators” and they were accused of internalizing Orientalist understandings of Indian women’s situation.⁹ Metcalf’s Islamists were at the other end of the spectrum in this regard and their work demonized European women. Maulana Mawdudi, the most successful Islamic reformer within this category, expanded upon “the horrors that followed upon the freedom of Western women” and critiqued the “‘Oriental Occidentals’ who mimicked and parroted the West without knowing the implications of what they were doing” in his writings in the 1930s.¹⁰

Mawdudi forged his ideas during a period of colonial rule when the Muslims in the Indian subcontinent were fighting to get rid of the British while simultaneously struggling against the idea of Hindu dominance in an increasingly communal atmosphere of colonial India. He eventually came to the conclusion that an Islamic revival was the only answer to the Muslim predicament. It was for both this and “for Muslims to mobilize their resources to confront the Hindu challenge . . . [that he believed that] they had to free their souls from Western influence.”¹¹ The Western Other, both

as a distinct civilization and as a people, was constantly used to educate Muslims about what they must denounce, what they must overcome. Thus “Mawdudi’s vision was a product of a discourse with the ‘other,’ the West” and largely revolved around denouncing this other and the values associated with it.¹²

The drive to bring about an Islamic revival among the Muslims and strengthen them as a community eventually led Mawdudi to create the *Jama‘at-i-Islami*, the most prominent religio-political party in Pakistan today, in 1941, six years before the partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. He was the head of the party for thirty years and played a critical role in giving it its current structure and infusing it with an Islamic ideology he developed over the years. His discourse about women is captured in his 1939 publication titled “Purdah and the Status of Women.”¹³ While his book was addressed to his Oriental Occidentals, both men and women, and aimed to illustrate the dangers and the moral and social decay that would befall them if they continued to follow Western culture and ideals, his emphasis was on women’s behavior, both Western and Muslim.

Women often come to represent contesting differences between groups. Questions of morality hinge upon the behaviors of women rather than men, and are used in . . . discourses aimed at creating an unacceptable and alien “other”, made more “other” by the imagined complete otherness of their women folk.¹⁴

Mawdudi thus used a significant portion of his text to lay out his theory of how the industrial revolution, the idea of individual freedom and capitalism, facilitated women’s economic independence, gender equality, and a free interaction between the sexes, conditions which he believed caused the West’s moral bankruptcy. It is in this context that he, for instance, frequently claimed that interactions between the sexes resulted in “free sexual indulgence and licentiousness [that] has disrupted the family system” in different European countries.¹⁵ Women’s active presence in the public sphere and their interaction with men is thus linked with moral decay and, equally importantly, a reduced interest in fulfilling one’s responsibilities as a wife and a mother, both of which are perceived to be the bedrock of a stable home and ultimately a stable society, “upon which depends the very existence of [the] human race and civilization.”¹⁶ Mawdudi’s concern with regulating female behavior and sexuality was thus directly connected to his concern with social stability. He did not limit his critique to the Muslim women whom he believed followed Western ways of being, but also critiqued the male Oriental Occidentals for the role he believed they played in encouraging their female family members to follow Western values and behaviors in the name of emancipation.

Mawdudi and the *Jama‘at-i-Islami* upheld the idea of a global Muslim ummah or community. They were therefore against nationalism and did not support the idea of Pakistan as a separate nation-state in the lead up to its creation. It took them some time to regroup and regain their credibility after Independence in 1947. However, they gained significant popularity by the 1970s due to a combination of reasons: developing an effective nationwide organizational structure, increased revenues from the sale of their religious literature from the 1950s, gaining substantial financial support from propertied elite as well as rich Gulf states, aggressive religious outreach – through neighborhood religious study groups, their student wing the *Jami‘at-i-Tulabah*, and

through various affiliate organizations such as the Pakistan Medical Association, etc. who proselytized on their behalf – inroads into institutions like the bureaucracy, support from the lower middle class who were put off by the “moral laxity” of the 1960s and 1970s, etc.¹⁷ The *Jama‘at-i-Islami*’s diligent efforts to proselytize in a very systematic and strategic manner meant that Mawdudi’s Occidental discourse about the decadent West and the sexualized Western and Westernized woman, who created *fitna* or chaos within society and undermined the institution of the family, spread within society and began informing public consciousness within a few decades of partition. It is in this context that we see similar ideas, which are even articulated in a similar manner, gradually make their way into Pakistani films through filmmakers’ representations of these women.

There is a remarkable parallel between Mawdudi’s essentialist discourse about the West, Western women, and the Oriental Occidentals, and the discourse about them in Pakistani films. Both present a reified picture of the West, which they identify with moral decadence, and highlight the role of clubs and the behaviors associated with it – e.g. dancing, drinking – with a sexual inflection and sexual perversions. Women are criticized for engaging in these immoral activities and attempting to attract men through an increasing degree of nudity and shamelessness, as are the men who encourage women to behave thusly. Both demonize women’s independence and justify their position by displaying a strong concern for the stability of the home and of society. The next section highlights these parallels in order to underline this interplay of similarities and echoes, even though the two mediums – political/religious writings and popular film – differ so radically.

THE MAGHRABZADA WOMAN IN PAKISTANI FILMS

Cabaret dancers were the earliest manifestation of the Western woman in Pakistani films. Rakshi was a well-known dancer who often did cabarets in films, for instance, in the 1956 hit *Intezaar* [*The Wait*] in which she sings and dances to the catchy “*jawani ki ratein, jawani ke din*” [*Nights and Days of Youth*]. Zamurad’s cabaret to the song “*kaisa jadugar dilbar*” [*My Magician Beloved*] in Hasan Tariq’s *Tehzeeb* [*Tradition*] (1971) is another well-known number. Wearing flounced skirts, sequined maxis, and dancing to the accompaniment of non-South Asian musical instruments like the saxophone, trumpet, bass, and drums in venues like clubs or hotel lounges, the cabaret dancers were clear symbols of the West; as were the many vamps who played the role of the seductress, such as Husna in *Dilruba* [*Beloved*] (1975).

These early Pakistani films were made in a social environment in which cabarets used to take place in clubs and hotels in the larger cities like Karachi and Lahore. Inspired by the cabarets in Western countries in general and in Iran and Afghanistan in specific, they made their way into Pakistan in the late 1950s.¹⁸ The West and Western culture did not have negative connotations at that time. Film analyst and critic, Dr. Omer Adil,¹⁹ expands upon this idea as he sketches the atmosphere in the larger urban cities in the 1950s and 1960s:

The West was equated with positivity. . . . It was a very different environment then. We would have bars, could go and buy whisky anywhere. . . . The old gymkhana had a dance floor. Women would dance in saris, men had to wear dinner

jackets. Actress Manorma's Irish mother, Mrs. Daniels, had a dancing school in Lakshmi *chowk* [in Lahore] where she taught Western ballroom dancing to anyone who wanted to learn.

The character of the cabaret dancer clearly embodied a foreign Western culture but these characters were not demonized for this. It was only with time, particularly in the 1970s, that the West began to acquire negative connotations in commercial films and *different* permutations of the Westernized woman developed to depict waywardness. These changes occurred in conjunction with Mawdudi's and the *Jama'at-i-Islami's* increasing popularity in society.

Omer Adil divides *maghrabzada* Pakistani female characters into four different categories. These include the club dancer and the vamp; the *maghrabzada* woman with the heart of gold, as seen in Sabiha Khanum's Anglo-Indian brothel-running character "Mummy" in *Ek Gunah Aur Sahih* [*One More Sin*] (1975); the second wife or the main protagonist's stepmother; and the female protagonist who becomes *maghrabzada* and requires the hero's intervention to recover. I add a fifth category to this classification, that of the main female protagonist or supporting actress who is either brought up in the West or who becomes Westernized as an adult in Pakistan and who, unlike the women in the fourth category, receive no redemption.

This paper focuses on the characters in the last three categories mentioned above – the second wife, the Westernized female protagonist who is redeemed by the hero, and the woman who is either brought up Western or becomes so, and who is beyond redemption. My study of popular Pakistani films – films that became part of Pakistan's silver, golden, platinum, or diamond jubilee lists, each category marking it to have run for at least twenty-five, fifty, seventy-five, or one hundred weeks in Pakistani cinemas respectively – indicates that the characters in *these three categories were not limited to but certainly made their most frequent appearance in the 1970s*. Their characteristics were similar across films and can therefore be used to build a caricature and/or a prototype of a *maghrabzada* woman who, through her values and her behavior, threatens the existence of society itself. She is therefore either redeemed or, more frequently, punished. The latter becomes a particularly effective way of sending out a moralistic message of the hegemonic gendered expectations society has from "good" women²⁰ and the dangers that would befall them if they were to violate these expectations.

Filmmakers have often used language and appearance to tag a woman as *maghrabzada*. Both are common ways of reading people's identities along a range of axes and filmmakers have used them as signs of people's values and lifestyle, Eastern and Western, in this context. What was articulated by Mawdudi in prose, and what had begun informing public consciousness, is brought to life in these characters – in the "flesh and blood" of cinema. It is because these ideas and images are based on what have become popular caricatures in society that they serve as an instant shortcut into understanding the behavior, social norms, and worldview of this caricatured group, leading to an immediate comprehension through the prior associations they invoke.

A number of Pakistani filmmakers have therefore interwoven English words in the characters' dialogues in order to make them come across as either modern or Western.²¹ A change in the same character's speech, from pure Urdu to Urdu interspersed with English words, thus becomes an outward manifestation of an internal change.

We see this clearly in *Tehzeeb*, in which film actress Rani is shown as a simple, uneducated young woman who marries a rich and “modern” man who clearly exemplifies Mawdudi’s male Oriental Occidental. It is because of such men, Mawdudi claims, that

. . . wives, sisters and daughters in full make-up, are brought face to face with friends . . . and are encouraged to mix freely and have good time with them in a manner and to an extent unimaginable for a Muslim lady even in company of her real brother.²²

A remarkable parallel can be seen between such men and Rani’s husband who insists on making her equally modern by teaching her English, and who changes her wardrobe, shows her how to dance, and encourages her to drink alcohol and interact with men at his club. All of these characteristics have become standard identity markers of *maghrabzada* people over time. Thus the change in the way Rani greets her husband’s paternal grandmother – her initial “*salaam dadi*” [*salaam* is a Muslim greeting that means “blessings be upon you” and *dadi* is a term for a paternal grandmother] is replaced with a “Hel-lo Grandma” – is not just a painfully amusing illustration of her transformation but is one that is clearly intended to highlight and underline the nature of that transformation – one that has led her away from the East and brought her closer to the West and everything that it popularly represents. Blonde or brunette wigs, Western attire, and the English language are popular markers of the immoral West in these films and provide the audience with instant cues to position these characters with reference to their values, or rather lack thereof (see Figure 6.1 on page 129).

This *maghrabzada* woman is often juxtaposed with the good *mashraqi* or Eastern woman who displays an opposing set of characteristics and values. Fari and Roohi, played by actresses Babra Sharif and Zeba respectively, are sisters in Shebab Keranvi’s film *Nauker* [*Servant*] (1975), and their characters are used to exemplify these Western and Eastern values respectively. Fari exemplifies the demonized Western woman, who wears Western clothes, takes pride in being the life of a club where she dances with men, and enjoys an active social life. Her stepfather frequently criticizes her behavior, for instance, telling her mother that “Eastern daughters do not become the life of modern society,” on one occasion. Fari is also frequently rude and inconsiderate, disrespectful towards her elders, engages in lying, and puts her pleasure and her needs above her family’s repute. Her sister, in stark contrast, embodies what are popularly touted as Eastern virtues; she only goes out to study or to frequent religious gatherings, only wears Eastern clothes, invokes the name of God before beginning a new activity, and is charitable and polite. Most importantly, she puts her family’s needs and reputation before her personal desires, as captured in her immediate willingness to give up the man she loves when her father decides that he should marry the other sister. In her words, “I consider my father’s decision to be the final decision.”

Dosti [*Friendship*] (1971) also exemplifies both Eastern and Western caricatures. Actress Shabnam depicts the former in her role of a simple, innocent village girl while Husna plays the role of a young woman, called Baby, who is born of a Pakistani father and an English mother and was brought up in England. The film repeatedly compares the two characters to demonstrate the problems that arise when children grow up in a Western atmosphere, and have Western mothers who are unable to

transmit Eastern values and culture to their children. Baby's father often laments the mistake he made when he married an English woman. "I married an Englishwoman because of the passions of my youth," he mourns. "I forgot that she would become the mother of my children one day."

Western mothers (e.g. in *Playboy* [1978] and *Dosti*) and Westernized mothers (e.g. in *Nauker*, *Mohabbat Zindagee Hai*, *Kora Kaghaz* [Blank Page, 1978] etc.) are all held responsible (through no fault of their own in the case of the Western mothers) for failing to transmit important Eastern values and ideas – obedience, respect, morality, family – into the next generation; in other words, for failing to carry out their most basic responsibility in the gendered worldview of these films that is based on a strict gender division of labor. *Maghrabzada* mothers are portrayed as bad mothers as they see nothing wrong in their daughters adopting Western behaviors and values, and because they are oblivious to the personal and social consequences of such behavior. As such, they are shown to encourage their daughters to frequent clubs, dance with the men there, have boyfriends, and be independent.

It is this last characteristic – independence, or rather independence that can lead to sexual autonomy – that is often demonized for what it represents, a threat to the institution of marriage and by extension social stability itself. Mawdudi has frequently associated unregulated sexuality with social instability. He tells us that:

The family system can neither be established nor can it work in a country where men and women have completely lost sight of marriage and its purpose, where sexual relation is aimed at gratifying sexual urge only. . . . In an environment such as this, the people are soon deprived of their capabilities to shoulder responsibility of matrimony, its obligations and rights, and sustain the moral discipline that it brings.²³

There is a long history of women being perceived as a source of social disorder both within and outside the Islamic tradition.²⁴ Women and their bodies are made responsible for a man's inability to control himself and their unregulated sexuality is believed to carry the potential for creating *fitna* within society. Thus the Islamic tradition that was "formulated in legal thought and guarded by scholars from the earliest centuries of Islam, focused . . . on control of their [women's] sexuality" through veiling and/or seclusion, regulating their contact with men, etc.²⁵ And although these are common themes within the Islamic tradition, Mawdudi was one of the first Islamic reformers in South Asia who, because of his resistance to the colonial influence in producing Western identities for women, constructed the image of the Western woman as an embodiment of unregulated sexuality who would serve as an example of how such behavior could create havoc in society.

Thus independent women are usually depicted as immoral in these films. Going to clubs is one of their standard behaviors. Mawdudi made repeated references to newspaper articles and other pieces of Western writing to depict the West as a den of iniquity and wickedness. He has, for instance, claimed that "almost all ballrooms, night clubs, beauty parlours, manicure shops, massage hairdressing shops in America have turned into houses of prostitution."²⁶ The clubs in these films are often as Mawdudi imagined them, i.e. as spaces where all kinds of perversions, sexual and otherwise, take place. Going to these spaces, having boyfriends, and dancing with men are

all common ways in which women's independence is depicted and the audience is repeatedly reminded of the immorality such independence leads to.

These are the women whose unchecked sexuality gives them the label of “bad women,” women who can be a source of temporary pleasure and the object of male desire, but whose behavior makes them an inappropriate marriage partner in a patrilineal system in which ensuring paternity is a high priority and requires a control of their sexuality.²⁷ Their alleged immoral behavior, especially their interaction with men in places like clubs, automatically makes others question their character and lead to their lesser value in the marriage mart. Tony, the male protagonist in *Playboy* and who enacts all the behaviors associated with one, does not consider Momi (who is a watered down version of his own character) as a potential marriage partner because she is “shameless and immoral, ready to fall into everyone's lap.”

All the female characters mentioned thus far reproduce an essentialist understanding of what the West represents. The West's association with an uncontrolled sexuality repeatedly comes out as one of the most important differences between it and an Eastern culture. Momi's father (*Playboy*) married an English woman and gives her his example to highlight this point as he discourages her from her *maghbra-bzada* ways:

look at me if you want to learn a lesson. I left my roots and adopted this [Western] culture. I got lost in fleshly desires and drink. I lost my identity. And it was too late by the time I came to my senses. This culture turns humans into animals.

Similarly, a conversation between Baby and the main male protagonist in *Dosti* also highlights this theme. The conversation begins when he makes a disdainful comment about the dancing throngs in a club in London and ends with his claiming that the women there “will try anything to attract men. They display all their body parts, bare their skin. . . . That day is not far when fashionable women will roam around naked in market places in order to gain men's attention.” This last comment is immediately followed by a brief and completely random clip of English men and women in bathing suits on a beach. It is striking that such representations of the West and the values and behaviors that are associated with it are identical to Mawdudi's conception. He made these associations decades earlier when he said that:

The free intermingling of the sexes has brought in its wake an ever-growing tendency towards showing off, nudeness and sex perversion. . . . In the absence of any moral restraint . . . both the sexes begin to show off and display their physical charms without any consideration for decency. This tendency ultimately culminates in nudity. And this is what is happening in the Western civilization today. To develop a magnetic attraction for man has become a mania with the woman there. When, however, she cannot satisfy this mania in spite of bright and dazzling dresses, seductive cosmetics . . . the poor disgusted soul jumps out of her clothes.²⁸

Western culture and values are clearly linked with moral decadence and animal-like behavior in both Mawdudi's discourse and in Pakistani films of the 1970s. These

associations are juxtaposed with the East and Eastern values, as is seen in Mawdudi's critique of the Oriental Occidentals, who he argued believed that:

material gains and sensual pleasures are of real worth, whereas the sense of honour, chastity, moral purity, matrimonial loyalty, undefiled lineage, and the like virtues are not only worthless but antiquated whims which must be destroyed for the sake of making progress. These people are indeed true followers of the Western creed. They are now trying their utmost to spread and propagate it in the Eastern countries.²⁹

Discourse such as this, which is subsequently found in Pakistani films, creates and reproduces an opposing, mutually exclusive binary dualism between the Self and Other, whereby the Other is continuously referred to as a source of social destruction. Irfan, Farzana's brother³⁰ and the main male protagonist in *Mohabbat Zindagee Hai*, draws upon this essentialist dualism when he argues with his stepmother over her allowing Farzana to go to a club. "The storm that is this Western culture will blow away all the happiness in this home." The characters in these films display a lot of concern with the increasing presence of this Western culture in their society and it is frequently referred to as a poison (*Mohabbat Zindagee Hai*), a cesspool of sin (*Tehzeeb*), etc.

There is a fear that getting lost in fulfilling one's selfish desires will destroy the family, create social chaos, and threaten the very existence of Eastern society. This fear has meant that women who embody Western values and behaviors cannot be allowed to get away with it and are often, unless they are redeemed through the efforts of a morally upright male, severely punished. Thus some of these women, like Farzana, see the error of their ways through the hero's intervention and are allowed a happily-ever-after. Farzana's mother and Fari's mother also see the error of their ways when they realize how their valorization of Western values and their Western style of mothering, which allowed their daughters limitless freedoms, eventually harmed their daughters. Other female characters, however, are turned into an example of what happens to those who violate the normative behavioral expectations of society. Pakistani filmmakers have utilized the trope of the *maghrabzada* woman and placed her within narratives which depict her meeting a terrible end in order to underline the importance of and propagate hegemonic gendered expectations that are grounded upon women's constrained and controlled sexuality.

Following this punitive impulse, rape is a common tool to punish *maghrabzada* women in Pakistani films. Fari is raped by her male friend in *Nauker*, Momi is gang raped in a club in *Playboy*, and Rani's character is raped by her husband's friend in *Tehzeeb*. This is a very serious punishment, not just because of the violation it entails but also because a woman's sexual violation is linked with a loss of her and her family's *izzat* or honor and may have far-reaching consequences that include but are not limited to stigma, social ostracism, ridicule, not getting marriage proposals, etc. Rape is often deemed a fate worse than death due to these reasons. And once raped, these characters have to die for redemption; redemption for their prior lifestyle and for the rape itself, which has left them sexually impure and dishonored. Fari and Rani's character commit suicide, and Momi dies of her post-rape injuries. Baby does not get raped in *Dosti* but she does die in a car accident. These women's punishment via rape is a clear example of victim blaming, where women pay the price for behaving

in a socially disapproved manner. Furthermore, the ubiquitousness of their uniform fate normalizes violence as an acceptable response to their disrupting hegemonic gendered expectations associated with “good” women while simultaneously providing insights into social anxieties.

Although depicted in Pakistani films both before and after the 1970s, the *maghrabzada* women described above made their most frequent presence in this decade. I have highlighted the *Jama‘at-i-Islami*’s activities since partition to suggest that their increasing popularity encouraged these representations and their higher frequency in Pakistani films in this time period. Filmmakers are likely to have drawn upon a discourse that had become widespread by that time. But I now examine the larger socio-historical context and the film industry’s subsequent evolution within it to question how much the *maghrabzada* woman’s usefulness as an object of moral derision was complicated by the film industry’s imperative for sexual titillation of its audiences.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE MAGHRABZADA WOMAN – FROM THE 1970s TO THE PRESENT

The films mentioned above construct a reified image of an immoral West and this imagery is repeatedly drawn upon through the *maghrabzada* woman’s character in order to label and demonize such values and behaviors. A few of the filmmakers, for instance the Keranvi brothers (who made films like *Nauker*), genuinely believed in this discourse and used their films to send out moralistic messages. Yet it is important to note that other filmmakers wanted their films to have drama and do well at the box office and many of them began increasing the sensationalist content of their films from the late 1960s to make their films more entertaining. These filmmakers’ desire to provide greater entertainment was connected to their attempt to overcome a range of challenges and setbacks during this time period. Competition from the VCR and pirated films, and the loss of an Urdu language film market when East Pakistan – a substantial source of revenue – became Bangladesh in 1971, are some key examples of these challenges.³¹

An examination of the challenges the Pakistani film industry faced during this time period and the manner in which many filmmakers responded to these offers a different perspective on the reasons for the *maghrabzada* woman’s increased presence in Pakistani films during this time. Drawing upon and bringing in imagery about the decadent West and the *maghrabzada* woman gave filmmakers a legitimate excuse to add some *masala* or spice in the film, hence increasing its entertainment value. This character could provide a kind of entertainment that the good Eastern woman, who displayed an opposing set of characteristics, could not provide. The good woman could only be allowed to dance demurely. The *maghrabzada* woman and the other dancers shown in the club had no such inhibitions. The original aim of these representations, that of providing Muslims with an Other that could be used to illustrate what was wrong with the West, and to encourage them to transform into “pious” individuals so that they could avoid their fate – that of moral bankruptcy – and establish a superior culture, therefore gets turned on its head.

Mawdudi and his followers used his Occidental representations of the West and Western/ized women as a pedagogic device that aimed to regulate women’s sexuality in order to reproduce a patrilineal and patriarchal social order. Filmmakers’ precise re-creation of his worldview in order to entertain, allure, and even titillate audiences

becomes highly ironic, especially given his view that “obscurity and licentiousness is in fact . . . caused by widespread literature, pictures, cinema, theatre, dancing, and nude and immoral public performances.”³² The opposition between the East and West has clearly been put to multiple, and often contradictory, uses.³³ The demonized (oft blonde haired) *maghrabzada* woman represents a Western woman who posed the threat articulated by Mawdudi, and yet at the same time, is transformed into an object of desire for the local male gaze that is seeking gratuitous entertainment through increasingly sensationalist films. This is true even as these representations are simultaneously used to valorize Eastern women who are shown to be the former’s superior through their “sexual purity” and their gendered appropriate behavior, which makes them both the symbol and practical caretaker of the sanctity of the home and subsequently the sanctity of the nation.

I began this paper by referring to Homi Bhaba’s idea of the Other being an object of desire and derision in colonial discourse and suggested that it could be flipped, whereby the Other, it can be argued, looks back in a similar manner. The filmmakers who put the *maghrabzada* woman’s character in their films use these characters to entertain a male audience even as they punish and judge these characters for their behavior. In this double perspective Mawdudi’s vision is brought to light, but the pedagogical lessons to be derived could be sexually inflected by images on the screen. There is a disavowal here, in which “a powerful fascination or desire is both indulged and at the same time denied.”³⁴ “The disavowal . . . allows the illicit desire to operate.”³⁵ However, this character’s subsequent demise and other changes in the Pakistani film industry in the 1980s leads me to argue that even though the *maghrabzada* woman was an object of desire up until this point in time, the desire was not for the other but was rather tied to her being a woman who could, because of her status as the other, manifest an overt sexuality to satisfy the male gaze. As an aside, it is also interesting to think of various parallels between the *maghrabzada* woman of the 1970s Pakistani cinema and the sexualized heroines of Western Film Noir movies, also portrayed in terms of their dark and dangerous sexuality.³⁶

The celluloid *maghrabzada* woman of the 1970s slowly disappeared from films over time. An increased circulation of global images meant that it became increasingly acceptable for main female protagonists to dress in Western clothes, etc.³⁷ These were now portrayed as a marker of global modernity, with its commodification of women’s glamor and sexuality, and were stripped of their prior meaning. The *maghrabzada* woman’s character lost a bit of its punch when her attire lost the negative connotations attached to it. More importantly, regional cinema began providing far more graphic entertainment.³⁸ Pushto language films in particular have become known for their “liberal sprinkling of ‘vulgarity’ . . . titillating dance sequences pushed past the censors.”³⁹ The main female protagonist’s repertoire in Punjabi language and even in Urdu language films began including provocative song and dance numbers. These changes fit the larger context of the film industry’s decline and the filmmakers’ interest in producing quick, cheaply made productions that were high on gratuitous entertainment in an attempt to hold onto their audience.

There is no reason to suggest that the audience that found pleasure in and were entertained watching the *maghrabzada* woman in the Pakistani films of the 1970s were entertained any less in the subsequent decades. If anything, the *maghrabzada* women come across as rather tame in comparison to the female characters’ overt and

graphic displays of sexuality in the 1980s and beyond. The Punjabi song “*nairay aa*” [Come Closer], for instance, is a rain dance sequence in the super hit Punjabi film *Choorian* [Bangles] (1998) and is an excellent example of this display. It is filmed with supporting actress Nargis, who attempts to seduce the male protagonist, played by actor Moammer Rana, by dancing provocatively, her rain drenched traditional rural clothes plastered to her body. The anti-West discourse faded with the *maghrabzada* woman, who became redundant in the face of these new heroines who seduced and entertained in both rural and urban contexts, and did so without being framed as or understood as *maghrabzada*.⁴⁰ The fact that the *maghrabzada* woman was easily replaced by other kinds of female characters as objects of desire suggests that it was her ability to manifest an overt sexuality, rather than her foreignness, that was the draw.



Figure 6.1 Rani in the film *Tehzeeb*.

Source and Permission: Poster, Omar Ali Khan's private collection.

While the cultural dissemination of these Occidental sexual beings encapsulated in the character of the *maghrabzada* women reduced significantly in films over time, these tropes remain alive in the public consciousness. The term continues to have the same meaning attached to it – that of an immoral woman who will destroy families and create havoc in society if she is allowed to have her way – and it is often strategically utilized in an attempt to “otherize” and delegitimize Pakistani women. Lines are drawn between societies as well as within societies through modes of differentiation, which often serve a political agenda that is catered towards maintaining the status quo. Drawing upon the Occidental discourse and calling women *maghrabzada* has become a popular way to discredit them and simultaneously establish one’s own authenticity and authority in a political sphere. Pakistani senators and parliamentarians who belong to religious political parties, for instance, often use this as a strategy to discredit women’s NGOs and/or women parliamentarians when they ask for women friendly legislation or make other demands to expand their roles and increase their rights. The continued existence of these images in public consciousness and their strategic deployment underlines the longevity and the power of a discourse that was forged in response to the colonial encounter and which aims to control women and their sexuality in postcolonial and Islamist contexts. It is the association with the foreign, the “not-Us,” the inauthentic, that gives those deploying this discourse the power to denounce others. Those on the receiving end of this discourse in this post-colonial nation state, thus, still find themselves affected by this contemporary version of the earlier colonial encounter. Battling a discourse that draws its power from its entanglement with the colonial/imperial Other and that has been kept alive to this day takes a lot of effort and energy.

The *maghrabzada* woman served as a temporary object of desire as a woman within the Pakistani film industry but she is frequently invoked and continues to serve a patriarchal agenda that revolves around controlling women’s sexuality and independence to reproduce a particular kind of social order. The longevity of these images’ deployment in postcolonial Pakistan is explained by their very specific function in this context and highlights the agenda of those who continue to uphold and reproduce these essentialist categories. At the same time, an examination of these images in Pakistani cinema highlights the limits of the colonial legacy even when the images that are being examined have roots in the colonial encounter. Shifting one’s perspective reveals that desire, or rather objectification, does not discriminate in this context and trumps all boundaries. Patriarchal interests get served in both cases.

ENDNOTES

1. This line from a song in the film *Mohabbat Zindagee Hai* is loosely translated as “I have left Eastern ways and taken up Western ones.” *Mohabbat Zindagee Hai*, 1975, Director: Iqbal Akhter, Producer: Begum Riaz Bukhari.
2. The term Western and its numerous variants are popularly associated with a lack of morality and “family values” in Pakistani public consciousness. I have put the term in quotation marks the first time I have used it to highlight my recognition of its constructedness. However, I forgo the quotation marks in the remainder of the paper with the understanding that the readers will recognize that its (and its variants) usage is situated in a particular local discourse that understands these in a stereotypical and essentialist manner. The term Eastern (and its variants) are dealt with in a similar manner.

3. See Seyyed Vali R. Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama'at-i-Islami of Pakistan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), for a seminal account of Maulana Mawdudi's life and the *Jama'at-i-Islami's* development.
4. Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse." In *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, ed. Mandy Merck (London: Routledge, 1992), 313.
5. Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question." In *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology*, ed. Gregory Castle (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 157.
6. Barbara D. Metcalf, "Reading and Writing about Muslim Women in British India." In *Forging Identities: Community, State and Muslim Women*, ed. Zoya Hasan (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1–21.
7. *Ibid.*, 7.
8. *Ibid.*, 9.
9. *Ibid.*, 10.
10. *Ibid.*, 15.
11. Nasr, *Vanguard*, 8.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Sayyid Abu'l Ala Mawdudi, *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam* (1939), accessed May 29, 2015. http://jamaatwomen.org/images/library/e-library_purdah.pdf
14. Jann Dark, "Crossing the Pale: Representations of White Western Women in Indian Film and Media." *Transforming Culture* 3 (2008): 125.
15. Mawdudi, *Purdah*, 41.
16. *Ibid.*, 14.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Personal interview with film critic and writer Aijaz Gul.
19. Personal interview.
20. Fouzia Saeed, *Taboo!: The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001).
21. The "Western" has negative connotations associated with it while the "modern" does not, or rather does not automatically. Characters can be modern and use the tools of modernity (for instance, a good education) to strengthen families, hence turning it into a desirable trait, especially among the upwardly aspiring middle class. Being Western, on the other hand, implies upholding values and lifestyles that challenge family structures and group values.
22. Mawdudi, *Purdah*, 22.
23. *Ibid.*, 41.
24. See Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992) and Metcalf, "Reading and Writing about Muslim Women."
25. Metcalf, "Reading and Writing about Muslim Women," 5.
26. Mawdudi, *Purdah*, 47.
27. Saeed, *Taboo!*
28. Mawdudi, *Purdah*, 16.
29. *Ibid.*, 53.
30. It is unclear whether they are half or step siblings.
31. Mushtaq Gazdar, *Pakistani Cinema: 1947–1997* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997).
32. Mawdudi, *Purdah*, 37.
33. Jonathan Spencer, "Occidentalism in the East: The Uses of the West in the Politics and Anthropology of South Asia." In *Occidentalism: Images of the West*, ed. James G. Carrier (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 234–257.
34. Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the Other." In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997), 267.

35. Ibid., 268.
36. E. Ann Kaplan, ed. *Women in Film Noir* (London: BFI Publishing, 1980), 35–39.
37. A parallel trend was witnessed across the border, in India, where “the line between the heroine and the vamp became a diffused blur, because the heroines began to do sensual dance numbers till the vamp’s character faded away” (*The Cabaret Effect: Political, Rebellious or Titillating?*, 2008, accessed May 29, 2015, https://worldpulse.com/files/upload/1674/the_cabaret_effect.doc, 5). See *The Cabaret Effect* for a discussion of this in a larger context of the “item number” replacing the cabaret in Bollywood, and Vasundhara Prakash’s *15 Seconds of Fame*, 2010, accessed May 29, 2015, <http://vasundharaprakash.blogspot.com.tr/2010/06/bad-girls-of-hindi-popular-cinema.html>
38. Urdu language films were seen in both East and West Pakistan and dominated the film industry in its initial years. Regional cinema came into its own in the 1970s. Mazhar Iqbal has made a very informative table that shows the number of films that were produced in the national (i.e. Urdu) and regional languages by the Pakistani film industry each year, and it can be found on his website on the Pakistani film industry at <http://mazhar.dk/film/history/>
39. Ali Khan and Ali Nobil Ahmad, “From Zinda Laash to Zibahkhana: Violence and Horror in Pakistani Cinema.” *Third Text* 24 (2010): 157.
40. It is important to note that there is a long history of women being divided into good and bad on the basis of their “sexual purity” and moral character in South Asia (Saeed 2001) and that the *maghrabzada* woman is not her earliest manifestation in society or the Pakistani film industry. The industry, for instance, has consistently relied upon older tropes, for instance that of the courtesan or prostitute, to manifest “bad” women who, even when portrayed sympathetically (e.g. in *Umrao Jan Ada* [1973]), often have to die because of their “impure” status.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

QUEER CAMOUFLAGE AS SURVIVAL, PRESENCE, AND EXPRESSIVE CAPITAL IN THE POSTCOLONIAL ARTWORK OF KIAM MARCELO JUNIO



Jan Christian Bernabe

In this chapter I present a critical analysis of a body of multidisciplinary artwork: a single-channel video piece *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study)*, *After Abramović* (1975), and *Mimesis I & Mimesis II* from the *Camouflage as a Metaphor for Passing*, a series all created by the Philippine-born and Chicago-based Kiam Marcelo Junio, a Filipino postcolonial multidisciplinary artist.¹ A former U.S. Navy corpsman for seven years before the abolishment of the U.S. anti-gay policy of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” Junio appropriates the term and act of *camouflage* from “their” military experience as a tactical aesthetic strategy of subversion that manifests both corporeally and materially through Junio’s artistic practice. After his service in the Navy, they would attend the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). I use the plural term “their” throughout this chapter since Junio identifies both as a postcolonial genderqueer or gender-nonconforming individual and artist as well as through a performance of Junio’s drag “alter-ego” Jerry Blossom.² Junio describes Jerry Blossom as “a genderqueer Filipino femme-presenting persona who hails from an alternate post-queer, post-colonialist utopia/universe in which the Philippines is a world power.”³

The appropriation of camouflage in their body of work from military vernacular and praxis, I argue, is an ironic postcolonial queer survival *tactical act* that emerges out of the legacies of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines – beginning in the late nineteenth century after the defeat of Spain during the Spanish American War and continuing on with the American colonial rule in the Philippines (1898–1946) – and the multiple valences with which the U.S. empire has burdened postcolonial subjects within the United States and throughout the Filipino diaspora. U.S. imperialism in the Philippines has left its mark on Filipino postcolonial subjects, whether through American cultural imperialism that the author Jessica Hagedorn has masterfully woven into her novel *Dogeaters*; or through transnational flows of labor, an example being that of Filipino nurses in the United States; and through the continued presence of American military in the islands despite the “official” closures of American military bases in 1992.⁴ In other words, while the United States officially recognized Philippine independence in 1946, the U.S. empire’s presence continues to impact the Philippines and Filipinos to this day. Following this premise of American dominance,

this chapter heeds Sarita See's intervention of claiming Filipino postcolonial subjects as "foreign in a domestic sense" – postcolonial subjects that are always already queer in relation to the U.S. empire.⁵

My use of the term *tactical act* also signifies a self-conscious, deliberate aesthetic strategy that cannot be separated from the politics of race, sexuality, gender, and representation, especially given the fraught history of U.S.–Philippine postcolonial and ongoing neocolonial relations. Indeed, as Lisa Lowe argues, "the question of aesthetic representation is always also a debate about political representation."⁶ As recent scholarship has argued, Filipino American, and more broadly, Asian American racialization, is woven intricately to gender and sexuality.⁷ Historical representations of the exotic Asian female and the emasculated Asian male continue to resonate in American popular culture to this day. The Asian American actress Lucy Liu, for instance, embodies the exotic Asian female character in her role as Alex Munday in the *Charlie's Angels* movie franchise. And on the other hand, Asian American actor Matthew Moy plays the desexualized Han Lee in the hit television show *Two Broke Girls*.

The U.S. empire's historical and material entanglements in the Philippines and throughout the diaspora continue its ongoing attempts, whether through American military interventions or through the ubiquity of American popular culture throughout the islands, I argue, to create what Michel Foucault has labeled *docile bodies*.⁸ "A body is docile that," as Foucault writes, "may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved."⁹ Indeed, the biopolitics of the U.S. empire, the project of governance to discipline and manage the lives of colonized Filipinos, act as generative constraints for postcolonial artists. In their colonial governance of Filipino natives, visual technologies such as photography and political cartoons at the turn of the twentieth century worked to advance reductive and binary modes of representing the colonizer and the colonized (i.e., civilized versus primitive) – images of Filipinos as children guided into civilization by the United States were all too common.¹⁰ These reductive constraints have ironically also produced Filipino postcolonial bodies as agents of representations themselves, producing representations of Filipinos that interrogate the visual and discursive grammar of "us" versus "them." For example, in his seminal film *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995), Filipino American artist Marlon Fuentes questions the very nature of the U.S. empire's knowledge production by visually appropriating ethnographic strategies used by American colonial officials on Filipinos at the turn of the twentieth century.¹¹ Fuentes's appropriative ethnographic strategy in his film reveals the challenges that the Philippines and the ethnically diverse people presented to the U.S. empire's project of knowledge production about Filipinos as well as to empire building in general. Fuentes's film exposes the material and epistemic limits of the U.S. empire precisely due to the Philippine's geography and diverse population. Thus, it is important to recognize how, through their artwork, Filipino postcolonial artists like Marlon Fuentes and Kiam Marcelo Junio reveal the disorderly nature of the projects of the U.S. empire, especially its attempts to produce and ossify representations of Filipinos.

In this chapter, I am interested in the messiness and limitations of the U.S. empire, refracted through the appropriative tactics found in the artwork of Kiam Marcelo Junio. That is, in the U.S. empire's attempts to structure and order lives in the metropole and colony through visual and cultural productions, artists like Junio

show through their artwork how the U.S. empire has strayed from its original intent – its desire for material and epistemic order. The U.S. empire could not have expected the pointed historical and cultural critiques by postcolonial artists. Junio's artwork captures U.S. imperialism's limits, if not its failures.

ROUTES: THE MESSINESS OF THE U.S. EMPIRE

The artwork of Filipino queer postcolonial artists like Junio captures the representational slippages and the epistemic limits of projects of the U.S. empire. It is within these cracks and fissures that the artwork of Junio takes root and thrives. Junio's art works illuminate U.S. imperial dominance and its failures to create docile bodies insofar as these failures produce and reproduce binary and reductive modes of thinking about race and representation of Filipino post/colonized bodies. While on the surface the U.S. empire may seem to succeed in creating docile bodies without the power to self-represent, so dominant within colonial and postcolonial geographies and knowledge production; the empire, however, fails to fully contain the very bodies that it was meant to manage and control – or queer bodies that challenge its ethos. That is to say, Junio's art produces an anti-imperial and anti-colonial presence that stands counter to the U.S. empire's representational practices. In her assessment of Asian American art, Margo Machida notes: "The symbolic assertion of presence through strategic acts of visual representations . . . can provide a previously neglected people with a powerful claim to place in a society where their images are not the norm."¹² Thus, the proliferation of perverse or deviant modernities as evidenced by bodies and bodies of work that refuse to be assimilated into gendered and sexualized systems of colonial knowledge and governance are inspired by the very slippages within the U.S. empire.¹³ Moreover, these slippages in the discursive and visual regimes of the U.S. empire enable and inspire the creation of oppositional archives that hold therein queer postcolonial affects, desires, fantasies, and knowledge production.

Conveyed by the subheadings in this chapter, I use the terms that frame the linear telos of colonization as ironic signposts: from discovery, contact, and the aftermath. I do this not to reinforce colonial scripts about the Other, but rather to give readers pause so to think critically about the symbolic and epistemic power that these labels continue to hold within postcolonial studies. Visual and epistemic projects of the U.S. empire in the Philippines act as the scaffolding for this chapter and, more specifically, in my critique and analysis of Junio's artwork. Yet the content within these subheadings make it clear that the project of colonialism and neocolonialism was and continues to be messy, beholden to contradictions, and conducive to creative cultural production.

By way of describing my own path to discovery of Junio's work online, my discussion reflects an examination and interrogation of gender normativity that Junio's artwork inspires. Their work stands as a point-of-entry for critiques of U.S. imperial fantasies about Filipino bodies and bodies of knowledge. The spectral presence of U.S. imperialism looms behind Junio's work and, as I argue elsewhere, inspires an *archive imperative* for Filipino postcolonial artists like Junio. The archive imperative "is a critical, creative, and fundamentally political artistic praxis that, at its core, troubles the stability and certainties of knowledge production of the American empire."¹⁴ Indeed, Junio's work is in no way exceptional, but rather stands among

other Filipino postcolonial artists like Marlon Fuentes, Stephanie Syjuco, Michael Arcega, Gina Osterloh, among others within what Sarita See describes as this “Filipino American cultural moment.”¹⁵ This moment highlights the critical mass of contemporary artists of Filipino descent working in the United States from the 1980s to the present, whose artwork captures the ongoing concerns of race and representation, as imaged figuratively and abstractly. According to Sarita See, “That the Filipino American cultural moment constitutes simultaneously new and unfinished business indicates the need for alternative analytical frameworks for Filipino American art and expressive culture.”¹⁶ The production of art and performances by Junio and other Filipino postcolonial artists proliferates and advances decolonizing work within this current milieu.

“Filipino America,” as Sarita See writes, “owes its existence to the monumentally violent and monumentally forgotten inclusion of the Philippines in the United States more than a century ago.”¹⁷ I argue that this “violent and often forgotten inclusion” creates the spaces for Filipino postcolonial artists like Junio to recuperate collective and personal historical narratives of military experiences, for example, interwoven as critiques of the present in order to transform future trajectories of art historical criticism and canon formation. A Filipino queer futurity takes hold within Junio’s art practice. Their works, at once visually and viscerally alluring, also project a disruptive aura through Junio’s formal and conceptual performances. José Muñoz writes, “Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing.”¹⁸ Junio’s work speaks to an epistemic void of understanding the historical entanglements of the United States and the Philippines, and in particular between the U.S. empire and its Filipino postcolonial subjects. Something in the present moment is not enough. Something in Junio’s *oeuvre* causes viewers to pause, to think, to disrupt, to scratch their heads as they walk away.

Thus, Junio’s appropriation of signs and signifiers of the U.S. empire must be taken as their tactical act of survival that continues into the present day. Moreover, beyond appropriating the vernacular language and the signifiers of U.S. imperialism in their work, Junio challenges its hetero-patriarchal normativity through their drag persona “Jerry Blossom.”¹⁹ Jerry Blossom becomes an embodied performance of camouflaging, though with a conceptual twist. In their performances, Jerry Blossom refuses to submit completely to gendered binaries, hierarchies, and norms. Their performance of femininity is questionable. During live performances, Jerry Blossom’s audience either stands in awe at the sight of Jerry Blossom or is “mostly baffled.”²⁰ Jerry Blossom becomes the embodiment of the ultimate fear experienced by any imperial entity – in this case the U.S. empire – the fear of the disorder created by performative play, evoking potential havoc that their postcolonial queer body engenders. Like the artist Junio, Jerry Blossom is not a docile body, but rather a disruptive force with which U.S. imperial interests must reckon.

Junio’s video performance *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)* and the two art installations *Mimesis I* and *Mimesis II* from the ongoing *Camouflage as a Metaphor for Passing* series produce profound expressive capital through Junio’s use of the Internet (*YouTube*) as well as their appropriation of vernacular military aesthetics.

In broad terms, Margo Machida defines expressive capital as “a form of capital that adds greatly to a society’s repertoire of collective response to its moment

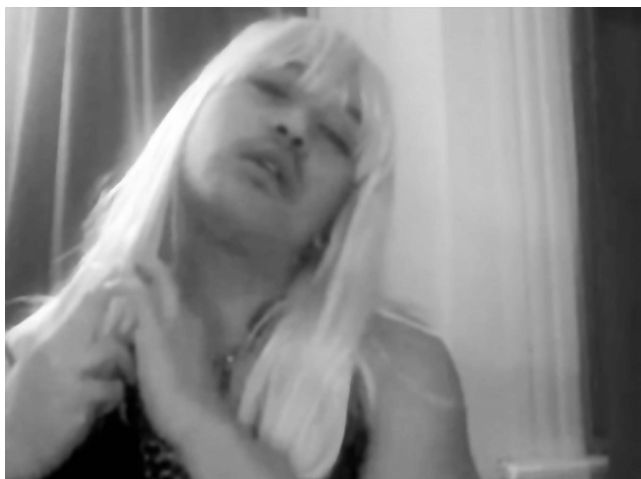


Figure 7.1 Screenshot of Jerry Blossom performing in *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study)*, *After Abramović (1975)*. Produced by Kiam Marcelo Junio, 2012.
Source and Permission: Kiam Marcelo Junio.

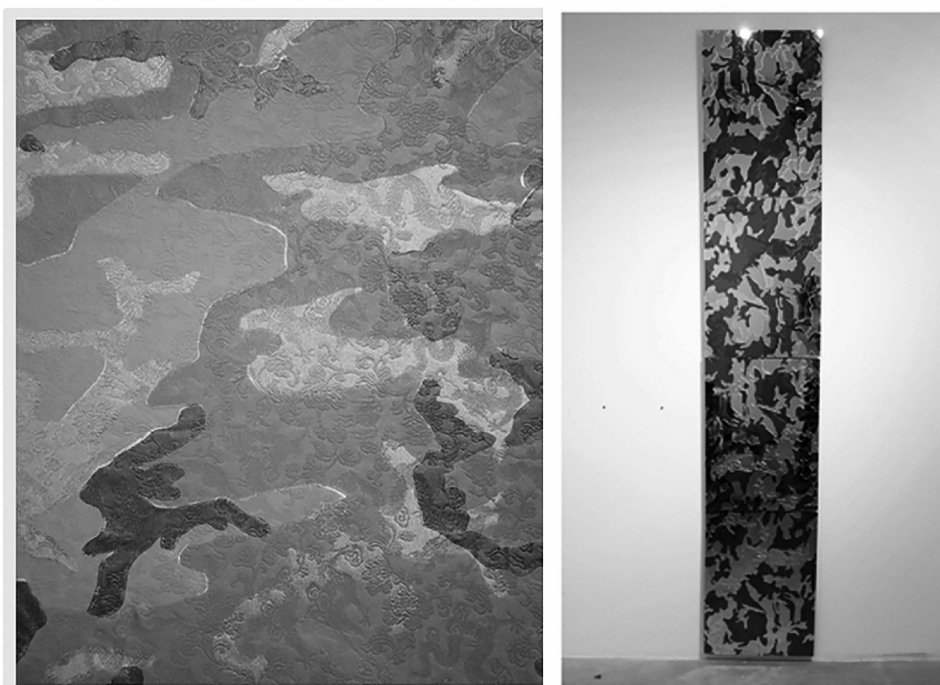


Figure 7.2 *Mimesis I* (2012), metallic ink silkscreen on Chinese silk brocade, 18 × 24 in. (left); *Mimesis II* (2012), mirrored acrylic (in various skin tones), 18 × 24 in. (right).
Source and Permission: Kiam Marcelo Junio.

and place in the world.”²¹ The expressive capital of Junio’s artwork takes a counter-hegemonic form by implicating the agents and actors of U.S.–Philippine relations, including other postcolonial subjects, Filipino, queer, or otherwise, in Jerry Blossom’s provocative performances. I take my discovery of Junio’s *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)* on the Internet as a sign of the tactical aesthetic strategy that Junio also deploys in the *Mimesis I & II*. The works are fierce rebuttals to the racial and expressive constraints of the fine arts world imposed upon post-colonial queer artists of color.

For Junio’s work, the Internet makes it possible to produce a disruptive art historical canon that captures Junio harnessing its technological potential in order for queer visibility and formation. That is, Filipino postcolonial queer artists like Junio use online social media platforms as sites for the creation, accumulation, and dissemination of expressive capital through their artwork as well as for social and political transformation. The serendipity involved in my discovery of Junio’s artwork can be read as a consequence of Junio’s tactical act of survival. That is to say, *YouTube* implicates me and other viewers, making possible the knowledge of the artist’s existence and the profound cultural work of their video performance through the potential of endless re-watching.

DISCOVERY: YOUTUBE AND THE MAKING OF COUNTER-CANONS

With over one billion users and over six billion hours of video watched each month, *YouTube* has become a ubiquitous presence throughout the world.²² In 2006, *Time* magazine declared “You” as the person of the year, citing *YouTube* as a platform, like *Facebook*, *Wikipedia*, and personal blogs, on which we, as users, worked “like crazy” to create profiles, avatars, blog posts, or book reviews.²³ The advent of Web 2.0 – the catalyst for the social and multimedia explosion online – has created users as laborers, or “playborers,” who expend countless hours of energy using the *World Wide Web* to attain expressive pleasure and to create expressive *and* economic capital.²⁴ With advancements in the creation of more responsive algorithms for search engines, everything and everyone is seemingly ordered and discoverable.

My discussion of the ubiquity of the Internet in today’s globalized world is to draw attention to the possibilities of discovery online, and more specifically, of platforms like *YouTube*, in what Nicholas Mirzoeff has called “world making.”²⁵ For the purpose of this chapter, I want to apply Mirzoeff’s term to the ways Filipino postcolonial queer artists like Junio use *YouTube* and other sites as spaces and tools to create artistic canons that often challenge the dominant commercially successful fine artistic canons, becoming themselves what I call *counter-canons*. The sheer ease of discoverability of content, curation, and digital publishing has created the possibilities of alternative “world making” and distinct “expressive capital” that produce repositories of information that stand counter to and challenge modes of sanctioned channels of knowledge production, such as nationally governed websites like the Library of Congress or even Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) sponsored by MIT, Stanford, and other colleges and universities. Postcolonial queer artists like Junio have exploited social new media (mobile) platforms like *YouTube*, *Vimeo*, *Instagram*, and so forth as creative laborers, producing new kinds of “expressive capital.” For Junio,

the Internet affords them the possibility for visibility and facilitates the production of queer new media sociality and queer “world making.” That is to say, Junio’s creative labor online participates in the production of a queer social web, which is critical of hetero-patriarchal normative culture and its epistemological resonance writ large.

The powerful search capabilities of platforms like *YouTube* have inspired generative and exciting experiences despite the quotidian nature of online information. But *YouTube*’s quotidian quality has given artists like Junio the means to create works in their own spaces. They can curate and present video artwork on their own time and to global audiences. Artwork posted online has the potential to be seen across the globe by millions of viewers because of search algorithms that blur the boundaries between and among nations without regard to locality, much like viral videos – those that have been seen by millions of people globally. Yet insofar as viral videos may be examples of the reach of *YouTube* and other video sites, they also often reinforce national, transnational, and diasporic identification practices by viewers depending on the location of their production. Mirzoeff posits that the virality of videos often becomes implicated in new media canonicity – that is, the ossification of a large-scale viewing mandate that builds popularity among a viewing public.²⁶ This is all to say that this frenetic moment of the global exchanges of information makes possible a heterogeneity of new media identification and disidentificatory practices; the creation of normative and queer social networks; and the ease of digital artistic production and curatorial practices.

It is at this point that I want to take a detour in this chapter to think about the stakes involved specifically in digital curation, especially of Junio’s art practice, the subject of this essay, and more broadly how it represents and interrogates the politics of representation in Filipino drag queen culture. My interest in Junio’s work emerged from my own curatorial practice, which, on a daily basis, involves surveying various websites and collecting images and information for curatorial proposals and scholarly research. I conceptualize the Internet as a rhizome-like repository of information, ever connected through hyperlinks to other sites and multimedia projects and experiences. Using the Internet allows those like Junio and myself, to use Martin Manalansan’s words in his description of Filipino drag queens appropriative cultures, “to play with the world,” being involved in distinct kinds of “world making” via digital and new media.²⁷ Indeed, this type of queer “world making” is a part of Junio’s tactical act of survival within the digital and new media moment. Such mediated “world making” offers an important intervention in the story of the U.S. imperialism versus Filipino postcolonial identities.

It was during one particular moment of trying to find inspiration for a show that I was curating, *Queer Sites and Sounds*, for the Center for Art and Thought, and I had typed the name in *YouTube*’s search field of the Serb performance artist Marina Abramović, well known for her long-duration performances and whose monumental long-duration performance *The Artist Is Present* (March 14–May 31, 2010) was presented at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York City. I sought inspiration from her work, setting out on this particular day to look for video clips of *Artist Is Present*, unbeknownst to me that my search would yield other performances by Abramović, as well as the work of Kiam Marcelo Junio.

While viewing a clip of Abramović’s *The Artist Is Present*, my eyes wandered to the other *related* works that populated the right sidebar. I had skimmed many

different videos of *The Artist Is Present*, clicking on the related works from the vast performance archive brought up by YouTube's algorithms. YouTube's algorithms had neatly organized other videos of past and contemporary performances by Abramović and other artists and people imitating and reacting to the Abramović's performances that were uploaded. The related video material created an archive of videos of hers and other people's performances. I had moved onto Abramović's iconic 1975 performance *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*, and it was during the screening of this video that another related video in particular caught my attention.²⁸ It was a video created not by her, though the title would indicate that she was its source of inspiration. The video *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)* by Kiam Marcelo Junio stood out against the other related videos.²⁹ The video was clearly inspired by and "a study" of Abramović's original performance as conveyed by its title. My discovery moment became symbolic of how Junio's video through its mere visibility and gender nonconformity – in Junio's rendition, the role of Abramović is played by a drag queen – unsettled the archive of Abramović's performances on YouTube.

Abramović's *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*, an hour long-durational performance, embarks on a feminist critique of society writ large through Abramović's repeated stroking and brushing of her hair while simultaneously saying "Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful."³⁰ The performance starts slowly and her utterances, softly; yet overtime, her words become louder and more aggressive as she self-inflicts violence through her combing and brushing actions.

As of the writing of this chapter, several abridged video recordings of versions of Abramović *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful* (1975) have garnered from over 50,000 views to over 130,000 views, and Junio's version has only yielded 134 views. The view counts certainly capture the ways in which the original performance has become part of the canon of performance art – the high view counts set the videos as the benchmarks from which Junio's study emerged. Yet the video rendition by Junio and the paltry 134 views should not be dismissed so quickly. Its inclusion within the panoply of other related Abramović performances speak, I argue, to its subversive potential from its algorithmic presence within the YouTube archives. That is, the YouTube algorithms created its potential to *pop up* unexpectedly while watching the canonical work by Abramović, helping to unleash its challenge to the canonical work. While Junio's *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)* would be perhaps dismissed by the gatekeepers of art history (art historians, patrons, and curators), Junio's performance marks an important point of contact for a queer viewing public. Those 134 views, I argue, signify the important queer cultural work that the video and artist perform to disrupt canon formation (digital, artistic, or otherwise) and to build a queer viewing social web (those who recognize the queer signifiers in Jerry Blossom's rendition), as well as a counter-canon.

Running throughout Junio's visual *oeuvre* is the ability of the artwork to grab the attention of viewers immediately by their use of their body. Junio as Jerry Blossom uses their body to *appropriate* the performance of Abramović's *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful* in their redux of the original. In the related thumbnail image, what is shown is Junio as their gender nonconforming drag persona. Jerry Blossom's appearance is a comingling of masculinity and femininity – a hybrid of Junio and Jerry as one – with Jerry Blossom having facial hair and donning a

platinum blond wig. Intrigued by the thumbnail image, I clicked to watch *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)*. This viewing would be my first contact with Junio's artwork, and it would ultimately lead me to the artist's larger artistic archive, specifically to *Mimesis I & II* from their ongoing *Camouflage as a Metaphor for Passing* series.

CONTACT: THE COLLISION OF ART AND BODIES

In its most fundamental meaning, *camouflage* is the means to disguise or to transform oneself in order to blend in with one's surroundings. Camouflage, while often used within military parlance, is also used to describe the behavior of various species in the natural world, as a defense mechanism to avoid predatory attacks. The term takes on a particular resonance when applied to Junio and their art. In their video performance *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)*, Junio recuperates Abramović's original performance in drag within the domestic space of their apartment. In that particular moment and time, Junio is their own audience; they can only see themselves on their laptop. Unlike Abramović, who by the release of the original *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful* in 1975 had already garnered international recognition – and a certain canonical acceptance – for her often daring solo performances, Junio's status in 2012, the year their video performance was produced, was that of an art school student. Junio's potential wider recognition emerged after their decision to post their video performance on *YouTube*.

Their performance of the redux of Abramović's piece in drag and more broadly their conceptualization of *camouflage* or *camouflaging*, I argue, is influenced by their experiences as a Filipino postcolonial queer sailor during the era of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) and the various location(s) within the Filipino diaspora that Junio traversed.³¹ Serving seven years prior to the abolishment of DADT, Junio likely masked their gender presentation and sexuality by blending physically, materially, and affectively through the act of camouflage within their military surroundings. Camouflaging in this sense is both performative (Junio's adherence to rigid military etiquette and aesthetics) as well as a mode of gender(ed) discipline in the Foucauldian sense (the demarcation of sexual and gendered boundaries between men and women in the Navy).³² The adherence to or a performance of a masculine gender was expected of Junio while they were in the military.

Junio created *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)* in 2012. Using the G.I. Bill that they earned serving in the U.S. Navy to partially fund their art school education, their use of the military benefit reveals (ironically) the tactical maneuverings of the artist. It is during their experience at SAIC that they began to challenge the rigid binaries of gender, masculinity, and femininity, turning instead to genderqueer identification practices and opting to use the third person gender pronouns: "they, their, them."³³

Compared to the black-and-white film footage of Abramović performing *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*, Junio's version was filmed in their home. In the original version, a nude Abramović starts slowly brushing her hair and deliberately repeating the phrase "Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful." The long-duration piece of the original lasts 60 minutes and culminates in Abramović using the comb through her hair in violent strokes much like a weapon. She also uses

the comb to scratch her face, violently, all the while repeating “Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful.” Junio’s rendition intervenes in the original staging of performance, marking their space, affect, and body as Other.

Viewers of Junio’s study are exposed to Jerry Blossom in a dimly lit room – wearing a platinum blond wig, black beaded necklace, and black tank top. If the reconfiguration of Abramović’s video occurs immediately, then so too does the camouflaging tactic deployed by Junio. The long-durational video, 43 minutes in total, pictures Junio layered in drag. From wig to clothing, Jerry Blossom is presenting to viewers a queer (i.e., non-normative, gender variant) image of themselves, powerfully signified by the phrase “Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful.” Unlike Abramović who performs in the nude in a nondescript space, Jerry Blossom uses the domestic space of the kitchen, wears a blond wig, and dons a feminine outfit to signify their feminine persona as well as to mark their domestic space as a space for their queer artistic production – and as a space in which postcolonial queer expressive labor and world making happens. For Junio, it is the art of drag that must be beautiful. And it is drag that queers the hetero-patriarchal normative spaces of the domestic.

The layered vision of Jerry Blossom in wig and outfit points to Junio’s strategy of camouflaging in their attempts to blend into the domestic sphere. Yet their drag appearance suggests that Junio does not fully submit to the assimilative or mimetic demands of gender normativity (within the sphere of U.S. empire). That is, Junio’s performance and appearance remain in an inchoate state – Junio conveys to their viewers that Jerry Blossom is enacting a form of gender nonconformity. Jerry Blossom in their seductive voice repeats: “Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful,” appropriating it from the original performance, but conveying to viewers its assimilative imperatives. Through Jerry Blossom’s performance, they tactically misrecognize the hail of gender assimilative demands of masculine and feminine gender imperatives. Such a tactical misrecognition, as José Muñoz writes, “permits a subject to demystify the dominant publicity, exposing it as a ‘discursively pre-constituted’ space that often maintains strict and oppressive hierarchies within the social.”³⁴ Indeed, Jerry Blossom captures the unmooring of gender, aligning with Judith Butler’s claim: “This ‘being a man’ and this ‘being a woman’ are internally unstable affairs. They are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification.”³⁵

Jerry Blossom’s performance is not marked by a direct parity between original and copy. She does not use a brush, but rather uses their fingers to brush through her blond wig – a mode of *kamayan*, Tagalog for use of one’s hands. Moreover, when speaking “Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful,” Jerry Blossom speaks in a Filipino accent. The violent repertoire found in the original Abramović performance is noticeably absent in Junio’s rendition. Indeed, there is a sense of subdued seduction and tactical subtlety in their performance that is missing in the original video. The staging, affect, and performance of the video, I argue, are variants of the act of camouflage within the domestic sphere, influencing Junio’s performance and gender nonconformity in their presentation. While the performance of Junio’s in *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)* reveals a certain degree of mimetic demands from the original video, it, more importantly, captures the improbability of the postcolonial subject to transform into the image of the colonizer. The video disrupts the ideals of the colonial *gendered* order of bodies, objects, and things. In his description of Filipino gay immigrants, Martin Manalansan writes: “[They] are not

passively assimilating into a mature or self-realized state of gay modernity, but rather contesting the boundaries of gay identity and rearticulating its modern contours.”³⁶ Junio’s performance is actively capturing the consequences – that is, the often violent gender demands – and not merely submitting to gender and sexual normative forces that emerge from colonialism and acted upon the Filipino queer postcolonial body.

Jerry Blossom’s performance aligns to Sarita See’s assessment of Filipinos being “foreign in the domestic sense.”³⁷ For Junio, markers of foreignness are not hidden, rather they are exposed through their gender presentation and performance. The domestic space of the dining room, and more broadly the home, becomes a metonym for the larger hetero-patriarchal normative domestic landscape of the United States; their presence is symbolic of the extent to which camouflaging becomes a necessary but limited tactic of survival within the domestic front. In the military, the practice of camouflaging is used during combative situations. In the video, Junio’s use of camouflage is more than just a metaphor for passing, as the titles of their later works would suggest, but rather it signifies an act of defiance rather than submission. Camouflaging in the Junio video reveals its combative impulse, one directed against the constraints of the art world and of the U.S. empire placed on queer artists of color like Junio.

AFTERMATH: MIMESIS I & II FROM CAMOUFLAGE AS A METAPHOR FOR PASSING SERIES

By way of a conclusion, I want to end by looking at two artistic pieces by Junio entitled *Mimesis I* & *Mimesis II* from their ongoing *Camouflage as a Metaphor for Passing* series. Created in 2012, *Mimesis I* & *II* align with the Junio’s ethos of exploring the notion of camouflaging as a survival tactic. Like the video, *Mimesis I* & *Mimesis II* do not offer complete fidelity to the original. The two works offer distinct and colorful variations of the aesthetics of camouflage often associated with military uniforms; Junio even appropriates the patterns found on camouflage fatigues. Junio’s *Mimesis I* & *II* are mimetically inspired by their reference to camouflage uniforms, yet do not conform identically to the original source. The artist offers a queer reconfiguration of the referent, re-signifying camouflage as non-normative and branding a queer political ethos onto the very term: *mimesis*.

While the term *mimesis* refers fundamentally to an imitative practice, the two works in *Camouflage as a Metaphor for Passing* series also offer up the possibility of socio-cultural and political intervention and change through their very conceptual and compositional framing. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one meaning of “*mimesis*” defines it as “the deliberate imitation of the behavior of one group of people by another as a factor in social change.” *Mimesis I* & *II* reconfigures the viewing practices of their audience, and in doing so, the work conveys to their viewers the stakes involved in both the act of camouflaging, the materiality of camouflage, and the relationship between the postcolonial queer body and camouflage. The pieces demand viewers to take closer inspection of the works.

If *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study)*, *After Abramović (1975)* plays on the long-duration and potentially repetitive imitative performance by Junio, then *Mimesis I* & *II* may also be read against a temporal framework. I argue that Junio’s service in the U.S.

Navy can be read as a long-durational performance for the artist, especially in light of pre-DADT repeal. While their life-experiences spent over a course of seven years in the military inspired their turn to military aesthetics in their series *Camouflage as a Metaphor Passing*, their experiences also served as formative grounding for their durational performances. Harkening back to the definition of mimesis as a means for social change, the two *Mimesis* pieces convey conceptual and temporal challenges to their viewers – ones that demand viewers to consider the queer materiality, especially in relation to bodies found within the military.

In *Mimesis I*, Junio presents a highly stylized, abstract camouflage pattern using Oriental silk brocade. The resulting piece draws viewers visually and viscerally into the frame to get a sense of the labor Junio expended on creating the brocade patterns and their careful placements. It is this act of moving closer to inspect and linger on the pattern and brocade work that must be read as a temporal gesture. This gesture for viewers to move closer to inspect the work is evidence of Junio's queer hail that they formally embed into the work to create the piece. That is to say, the piece itself immerses viewers into its queer frame, a conceptual *and* compositional decision that is also reflected literally in *Mimesis II*, a four-panel columnar installation created using laser-cut, mirrored, colored acrylic.

Junio's strategy of drawing viewers into the frame is similarly captured in *Mimesis II*. In it, Junio returns to the camouflage pattern. They use laser-cut acrylic to create the patterns out of the skin-toned colored material. If *Mimesis I* presents a queer reconfiguration of the camouflage military aesthetic through Junio's colorful, if not campy Warhol-esque silk brocade pattern construction, *Mimesis II* queers by directly implicating the viewer within the panels through its reflective properties – one sees oneself within each of the separate laser-cut mirrored acrylic pieces. Each of the mirrored patterned panels reproduces the viewers' reflections, drawing them into the piece – indeed, demanding them to scrutinize the artwork, but more importantly, to recognize themselves within the camouflaging. In short, *Mimesis II* implicates viewers through the mirror effect. If camouflaging is about hiding oneself in plain sight, *Mimesis II* disrupts the function of camouflaging by revealing rather than concealing the viewers of the installation. It is through the reflective aspect of *Mimesis II* that ultimately disrupts normative expectations of camouflaging. *Mimesis II* draws its viewers within its frames and literally inscribes them on the artwork's surface.

* * *

My readings of *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study)*, *After Abramović (1975)* and *Mimesis I & II* within the *Camouflage as a Metaphor for Passing* series capture richly layered postcolonial strategies of survival for Kiam Marcelo Junio. Junio appropriates the military term and act of camouflaging, I have argued, as an ironic tactical act that enables Junio to survive artistically and personally. The military legacies of the United States in the Philippines also inspire Junio's recuperation of military aesthetics and vernacular, highlighting the colonizing forces of the United States in the islands and throughout the diaspora. Junio's postcolonial conceptual and compositional repertoire, as well as a queering of self-representation through Jerry Blossom, as I have argued, cannot be separated from their experiences in the military. These

life experiences have inspired strategies of mimesis, whether through mimicry of the performance artist Marina Abramović or through the reappropriation of the camouflaging military patterns. Ironically, Junio's pieces don't hide in plain sight, as camouflaging would imply; rather, they command presence and visibility. Junio re-signifies the act and the production of camouflage, reframing it as a critical mode of interrogation of that which are seen and unseen, a politics tied to the very conditions and forces that define the artist's existence.

ENDNOTES

1. Prior to living in Chicago, Kiam Marcelo Junio lived in the Philippines, Japan, California, and Spain. In keeping with Junio's identification as genderqueer, I use their preferred gender third-person pronouns: "they," "their," "them" throughout this chapter.
2. Junio writes: "I identify as both genderqueer and queer, but prefer the term gender-nonconforming (under the umbrella of transgender, arguably under the larger umbrella of queer)." Kiam Marcelo Junio, e-mail message to author, September 22, 2014.
3. "About," accessed September 1, 2014. <http://www.iamkiam.com/about.html>. The term genderqueer, synonymous with gender nonconformity, exceeds the expectations of the binary masculinity and femininity. It embraces the fluidity of gender and challenges gender normativity. See Joan Nestle, Clare Howell, and Riki Wilchins, eds., *GenderQueer: Voices From Beyond the Sexual Binary* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2002).
4. See Jessica Hagedorn, *Dogeaters* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991); Catherine Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); "Philippines to Give U.S. Forces Access to up to Five Military Bases." *Reuters*, May 2, 2014, accessed May 1, 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/02/us-philippines-usa-idUSBREA4107020140502>
5. Sarita See, *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xi–xii.
6. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 4.
7. See Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *Straitjacket Sexualities: Unbinding Asian American Manhoods in the Movies* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Nguyen Tan Hoang, *A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
8. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 2nd ed., 1995).
9. *Ibid.*, 136.
10. There have been many studies on how photography, film, and other forms of mechanical reproducible images proved effective in advancing colonial projects and colonial understandings of the Philippines and Filipinos. See, for example, Benito Vergara, *Displaying Filipinos: Photography and Colonialism in Early 20th-Century Philippines* (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 1996); Abe Ignacio, Enrique de la Cruz, Jorge Emmanuel, and Helen Toribio, *The Forbidden Book: The Philippine-American War in Political Cartoons* (San Francisco: T-Boli Publishing, 2004); Nerissa Balce, "The Filipina's Breast: Savagery, Docility, and the Erotics of the American Empire." *Social Text* 24 (Summer 2006): 89–110.
11. See *Bontoc Eulogy*, prod. and dir. Marlon Fuentes, 56 min., NAATA, 1995, videocassette.
12. Margo Machida, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and Their Social Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 6.

13. I am taken by Ann Stoler's work on the contradictions inherent in the governance of colonial domesticity and "the colonial state's investment in knowledge about the carnal" in late-nineteenth century Dutch West Indies. Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 6–7.
14. Jan Christian Bernabe, "Queer Reconfigurations: *Bontoc Eulogy* and Marlon Fuentes's Archive Imperative." *Positions: Asia Critique* 24.4 (forthcoming).
15. For a discussion of "Filipino American cultural moment," see Sarita See, *The Decolonized Eye*, xxxi.
16. *Ibid.*, xxxi.
17. *Ibid.*, xi.
18. José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York University Press: New York, 2009), 1.
19. For discussions on the masculine gaze, photography, and westward expansion during the nineteenth century, see Aleta Ringlero "Prairie Pinups: Reconsidering Historic Portraits of American Indian Women." In *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*, ed. Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis (New York: International Center of Photography, 2003), 183–197. Laura Wexler interrogates the gendered dynamics of U.S. empire, and more specifically the ways in which women were, like their male counterparts, invested in advancing U.S. imperial projects during the nineteenth and early twentieth century through photography. See Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
20. Kiam Marcelo Junio, e-mail message to author, September 22, 2014.
21. Machida, *Unsettled Visions*, 6.
22. "Statistics," accessed September 1, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html>
23. Lev Grossman, "You – Yes, You – Are TIME's Person of the Year." *Time*, December 25, 2006, accessed September 1, 2014. <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html>
24. My use "playborer" is influenced by Julian Kücklich's article "Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry." In the article, Kücklich distinguishes the precarious boundaries of "modding" (or game modification) as practices of unpaid labor and leisure play, calling attention to the hybrid term "playbour." Julian Kücklich, "Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry." *The Fibreculture Journal*, 2005, accessed June 12, 2015. <http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-025-precarious-playbour-modders-and-the-digital-games-industry/>
25. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009), 224.
26. *Ibid.*, 243.
27. Martin Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 126.
28. Marina Abramović documented her performances, outlining the material and the directions for each. For her 1975 performance of *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful* at the Charlottenburg Art Festival in Copenhagen, Denmark, the directions for the piece were: "I brush my hair with a metal brush in my right hand and simultaneously comb my hair with a metal comb in my left hand. While doing so, I continuously repeat 'Art must be Beautiful, artist must be beautiful' until I hurt my face and damage my hair." Klaus Peter Biesenbach, *Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 80–81.
29. For the complete video, see *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)*, accessed September 1, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w84wDhdFDIA>

30. For a feminist critique of Abramović's *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*, see for example Marla Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain: Medieval and Post-Modern Martyrs, Mystics, and Artists* (Palgrave: New York, 2010), 83.
31. Signed into official policy by President Bill Clinton in 1994, DADT was eliminated in 2011 by President Barack Obama.
32. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).
33. Michael Schulman, "Generation LGBTQIA." *New York Times*, January 9, 2013, accessed September 1, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/10/fashion/generation-lgbtqia.html>
34. José Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 168–169.
35. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 126.
36. Manalansan, *Global Divas*, x.
37. See, *The Decolonized Eye*, xi.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

FICTIVE IDENTITIES ON A DIASPORIC ETHNIC STAGE A “modern girl” consumed in Dominican beauty pageants



Danny Méndez

Miss Dominican Republic U.S. is an exclusive event, which gathers young women from different parts of the country, whose origins are from the Dominican Republic, competing to be crowned as the most beautiful ambassador for the Dominican women in the United States. . . . As an official franchise of the Miss Dominican Republic Universe organization, the U.S. winner represents the Dominican community in the U.S. as part of Miss Dominican Republic Universe organization, giving her the unique chance to compete for the title that could potentially take her to Miss Universe.

—*About us* section of the website for the *Miss Dominican Republic U.S. Organization*

Beauty pageants have been a visible part of our societies, and more specifically of our cultural discussions on gender and nationalism, since the 1930s and 1940s. Until recently the critical consensus has been to note the inadequacies of these pageants in accurately representing the realities of women in contemporary societies, and to view them as tools for aligning attitudes towards gender, race, sexuality, nationalism, and local and global cultures with the hegemonic norm. Lately, however, more complex views have changed this consensus.¹ For example, Belinda Edmondson's definition of “public female performances” and the specific meanings placed on “different women's popular culture rituals and behaviors in the public sphere”² illustrates some of the complexities of representing idealized notions of beauty, race, and gender in conjunction with the political and historical events that mediated the national discourses of the countries represented in beauty pageants. In many ways, as I will argue here, Dominican beauty pageants can be seen as a national sport – a sport that illustrates some of the basic colonial and postcolonial fantasies of an island still navigating political and historical issues rooted in colonial discourses.

The Dominican Republic today has a complex and uneasy relationship with the United States. On the one hand the two locations seem to be linked by a seemingly permeable diaspora and perhaps these pageants may suggest easy global flows of cosmopolitan beauty and desire. Yet, as this essay will unfold, the story of the beauty

pageant points to contradictions between the roles of Dominicans as diasporic subjects of a former colony with its colonial past, and as citizens of the United States.

It seems appropriate to begin this chapter with a brief history of the Dominican Republic, spanning the colonial and postcolonial periods. Dominican racial and ethnic identities have historically developed in relation with Spain, Haiti, and the United States.³ As the Dominican scholar Silvio Torres-Saillant justly indicates, “Dominican society is the cradle of blackness in America,” insofar as the first African slaves in the Americas were landed in Santo Domingo in 1502.⁴ However, this fact was intentionally complicated in the myths fabricated by the nineteenth century Dominican elite. The story they told themselves about the nation’s racial past was inflected by contemporary concerns – especially the rivalry with Haiti and the hardening of racial attitudes in white Europe – as by the givens of the past.

It was in the eastern part of Hispaniola (Santo Domingo) that we first see the prototype of a Dominican identity emerging in the seventeenth century as a product of the social contacts between Creole elites (native born Dominicans of European or European and Indigenous origin) and the working class Afro-Hispanic population. France occupied the western part of Hispaniola (Saint-Domingue) in the seventeenth century, just as the eastern part was beginning to lose its one economic pillar, the exploitation of gold resources. The western half, under the French, became the base for an enormously lucrative sugar plantation system that was pursued with a ferocious intensity, using a massive population of slaves to supply the labor power. This led to a complex history of opulence and revolution in which alliances bound together sometimes very odd couples (for instance, French planters and mulattos) against rebellious slaves, and French Creole elites attempted to impose a permanent racial order through the infamous *Code noir*, which would rigidly associate people with their officially assigned racial category in the hopes of foreclosing on the formation of a Creole identity.⁵ By the time of the French Revolution, approximately 30,000 whites and 35,000 mulattos were on top of a social pyramid that was supported, at the base, by the labor of nearly half a million slaves of African descent. This structure was shattered in the series of slave revolts and civil wars that destroyed the plantation system during the period of the Haitian revolution (1791–1804). The cultural and political implications of these events, and especially with regards to the place of race within the adopted identities of this time alludes to how, according to Torres-Saillant, “The decay of the plantation and the virtual destitution of whites effectively brought the status of slaves and former slaves to a level identical with that of masters and formers masters, breaking down the social barriers between the races.”⁶ Here lay the roots of the racial dilemma Torres-Saillant effectively notes with regards to the recognition of blackness and Creoleness within the Dominican national imaginaries because there:

... the semantic field of *blackness* became restricted to *slavery* and *subversion*, fostering thereby a conceptual space that permitted free blacks and mulattoes in Santo Domingo to step outside the racialized constraint of color to configure their identity or align themselves politically according to other criteria.⁷

Thus, it is important here to recognize that we cannot impose twentieth-century racial categories to organize the history of this complex cross-racial struggle, as different

definitions of blacks and whites and their interests adhered. Even though some of the same social and racial issues pervaded after the revolution, “legally and politically blackness was conferred on all of its citizens, regardless of ancestry.”⁸ And thus when we analyze the place of race and blackness within the national discourses of Santo Domingo erected by politicians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we often times arrive at essentialized conceptions of identities that have constituted blackness as a coming from *outside* the Dominican national space. Furthermore, blackness has been associated with Haitians because of the contract labor scheme that brought Haitians to the Dominican Republic to cut sugar cane and that associated Haitians to a stigmatized group associated with a form of labor that was virtually slavery.⁹

This legacy of colonization accompanied by this complex racial, ethnic, and cultural mixing and mixtures forms an important background as we follow the trajectories of postcolonial, global desires and identity configurations produced by the Dominican diasporic beauty pageants. The visible impact and incorporation of Dominican diasporic queens in the national spaces created in beauty pageants in the Dominican Republic and the United States indirectly address the unique qualities of Dominican diasporas in our discussions of Dominican identities in a U.S. and global context. For example, Dominicans are the most “recent” group of Hispanic Caribbean immigrants to the United States if we compare them to Cuban and Puerto Rican migrations. But as I have illustrated above, four important events continue to affect them: (1) the effects of colonization (ethnically, racially, economically, and ultimately politically); (2) the (sometimes) tumultuous historical relationship with Haiti; (3) the ongoing effects of the Rafael Leonidas Trujillo dictatorship; and (4) the U.S. Occupations of 1916–1924 and once again in 1965.

Particularly the period after the dictatorship of Rafael L. Trujillo that lasted from 1930–1961 saw large numbers of Dominicans shuttle into American cities, largely on the East Coast in the United States (New York City, Florida, Boston, etc.) and into San Juan, Puerto Rico. The numbers of Dominicans were so large, in proportion to the population, that there has been discussion about whether they are properly classified as either a diaspora or as transmigration, which implies the preservation of home ties by massive transplantation. For example, Silvio Torres-Saillant defines a Dominican diaspora as follows:

The Dominican diaspora exists due to the large exodus that has marked our people. The last mass emigration in the history of the Dominican republic occurred in the early sixties and is distinguished from previous ones in that, unlike those, this one led to the formation of a diasporic community.¹⁰

Torres-Saillant then traces the term, *diáspora*, in both literary studies and migration studies in recent years, writing that “[The use of the term diaspora] . . . is extended to all contemporary groups that show, in an adopted land, the resources, sociopolitical structure, and discursive incentives to represent themselves as a diaspora.”¹¹ On the other hand, Peggy Levitt differs with Torres-Saillant’s pronouncement, declaring that “diaspora” refers only to specific conditions:

Some scholars also use the term ‘diaspora’ to describe the generalized relationships between migrants from a particular country throughout the world. I reserve

the term, diaspora, for a specific kind of transnational tie involving expulsion or involuntary exile, based on a remembrance of a lost or imagined homeland that is still to be established.¹²

As I have argued, the voluntarism underlying Levitt's definition does not conceptualize the deep and total reach of economic penury, nor the effect of a class-based level of control of the victims of economic injustice.¹³ Throughout this chapter, I apply the term, diaspora, to the Dominican migrations during the 1960s; I recognize the diasporic subject in relation to the cultural impact of these migrations, often under duress, but in which a nostalgia for the homeland remains alive. Thus, I suggest that this diasporic context impinges massively on the Dominican beauty pageants organized in the United States and the Dominican Republic.

I begin this chapter with a quote from the official website of the *Miss República Dominicana U.S.* pageant because it evokes official discourse that frames these contests, and consequently operates to represent them within the Dominican diaspora. One of the unconscious purposes of this rhetoric is to obscure the contradiction inherent in being both an "ambassador to" and a resident of the United States, or, in other words, eliding the ambiguity of a status that is both native and foreign at the same time. My main argument centers on the embodiments of diaspora that materialize in the *Miss República Dominicana U.S.* pageant, tracing them through their direct effects on the Dominican national stage by way of a different, considered a *sister pageant*, *Miss República Dominicana Universo* pageant held in Santo Domingo, the place of origin. The labeling of "diaspora" is categorically and symbolically ascribed in these pageants by the *Miss República Dominicana U.S. Organization* itself (which uses the politically charged term "ambassador"), and by investing the symbols which frame the winner of the *Miss República Dominicana U.S.* pageant, making her the literal embodiment of the U.S. Dominican diaspora. She must participate, in fact, as the diasporic delegate in the pageant held in the Dominican Republic itself. In a pattern I will unfold that has correlates in other diasporic activities, I will show that when the diasporic body of the beauty queen returns to the homeland, it is caught up in a nationalist competition that provokes historical anxieties inextricably linking ethnicity, race, and culture with displacement and diaspora. Who is the real Dominican? What kinds of criteria and desires for beauty were being produced by these dual, sister pageants? My hypothesis is that in these pageants the diasporic body in the United States, viewed as a "modern-girl," is perpetually perceived as being at odds with the national discourse. What is being staged, here, is both the national consumption and the ultimate rejection of diaspora in the place of origin.

My usage of the term "modern-girl" derives from the working definition reached by the *Modern Girl Around the World* Research Group in Duke University whose findings were published in 2008 in the book titled *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*. The term is apt for the diasporic framework because it illustrates:

[how] in any given geopolitical location, above all else, the modern girl was distinguished from other female figures and representations by her continual incorporation of local elements with those drawn from elsewhere. . . . Modern Girls, [are] historical agents who produced and performed new appearances and

subjectivities by incorporating elements from disparate locations, and to *representations* of these new appearances and subjectivities.¹⁴

As my case studies will illustrate, beauty queens that represent the diaspora, in this case the unique Dominican diaspora, in national contests are often times interpreted in two extreme ways. The first is as a modern woman who has mastered residency in the codes of the United States, and whose trajectory in the pageant circuit is paved by capital and sponsorship of multiple international companies. At the other extreme and in direct contradiction with the former image of mastery is the image of something less, something essentially lost, in forging the diasporic sensibility, which makes these delegates supposedly less authentic than the “homegrown” candidates for the national crown. What makes these diasporic delegates “less” is ironically what makes the beauty queen a modern commodity in the national beauty pageant, namely that she is not recognized as being a part of the Dominican national discourse.

BEAUTY PAGEANTS IN THE WAY OF DIASPORA

I will begin with a brief overview of the type of pageants that I am analyzing here – in this case, two paired, *sister pageants*, one in the U.S. diaspora and the other in the homeland, Santo Domingo. At first glance, the *Miss Dominican Republic Universe* pageant would seem to have a great number of similarities with its sister pageant, the *Miss Dominican Republic United States*. While in the former the candidate is vying for the title of Miss in order to participate in the *Miss Universe* pageant, the latter only gives the winner the permission to participate as the *diasporic delegate* in the *Miss Dominican Republic Universe* pageant. In fact, the winner of the *Miss Dominican Republic United States* pageant officially carries the sash and crown of the “Miss Dominican Community in the U.S.” Ironically, representation in the *Miss Dominican Republic United States* pageant is an incomplete and fictive staging of their life stories, since the regions or provinces that each candidate represents in this pageant do not correspond to their actual “lived” experiences of nationality and/or diasporic association. For example, in the *Miss Dominican Republic United States* the candidates compete not on the basis of where they are from in the United States (a geographic category that the contest lays aside), but instead represent the 32 provinces of the Dominican Republic. This means that in the U.S. pageant, the winner of which goes to the Dominican Republic as the U.S. candidate, does not aim to directly represent the diasporic communities purported by its title and its stated mission. The beauty pageant produces an identity, which seems fractured and displaced.

In fact most of the delegates of the U.S. pageant are of Dominican descent and were born in New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. During their competition in the U.S. pageant the delegates wear a sash with the name of a Dominican municipality, which gives the sash a fascinating semiotic function: it is nothing more than a symbolic allusion to a somewhat fictive claim to provenance. Each candidate, then, is split between a *fantasy body* that represents one of the 32 Dominican municipalities and a *real body* that represents their specific lived experiences as U.S. Dominicans in the diaspora. Like certain Catholic saints, the contestants are endowed at least metaphorically with the power of bilocation. However, the semiotic mysteries of the sash are not limited to this strangely fictive geographical

claim; for the contestant who wins and goes on to the *next* step in the pageant, the sash she wore originally, proclaiming a Dominican municipality she supposedly represented, is literally displaced. That municipality's beauty queen has in the meantime been chosen and is also being sent to the national contest. The American queen's new sash will proclaim her the contestant of the diaspora in the United States, restoring, in one blow, her real-life experience. In this sense, and in a highly symbolic depiction, we have the "authentic" queen from the home municipality competing against the former "imitation" from the U.S. diaspora. That is, the newly minted *Miss Dominican Republic U.S.*, who, in the first contest, ran literally as an imposter, now, in the homeland, competes against the authentic queen of the municipality she formerly "represented" as, in a second moment of her dialectical progress forward, an "authentic" queen of the U.S. Dominican diaspora. This backstage displacement of sashes restores the candidate's experience as a Miss representing the Dominican population in the diaspora, while at the same time conveying a certain depreciation of her place (and lived experiences of *dominicanidad*), since these are deemed as minor and manipulative and, most of all, imitative. After all, the "authentic" Miss representing her Dominican municipality has already won against the U.S. "imposter," who relinquishes her claim to that municipality in one sash change. And thus, in a striking displacement, the new U.S. contestant is forced to become the representative of something she was never fully allowed to embrace in the first place: the diasporic consciousness. She is, in other words, given back her diasporic authenticity only after having been initially forced to embrace an impostor's place, usurping the title of the Miss of a place she is not really from. She is a product, then, of what Etienne Balibar has noted as a "fictive ethnicity," which is a process that assumes the stability of the authentic even as it undermines it.¹⁵

To recap this curious dialectic I have been tracing: the notion of diaspora is present only via its invisibility in this first part of the two-tier process, while in the second moment, the crowned winner or the *Miss Dominican Republic U.S.* travels to the homeland to participate on the *Miss República Dominicana Universe* contest and literally wears on her sash a reference to the diaspora that was unmentioned and unmentionable in the first moment. Then, if she wins, her sash will tell the world (or "Universe") that she is *Miss Dominican Republic* – a country she doesn't live in. Practically, the diasporic delegates are at a disadvantage due not only to the amount of money they must invest to participate in *two* pageants, but also to the greater effort they must make in having to translate themselves at an affective level, and then at a cultural level. The U.S. beauty queen's task, if she is to be successful, is to at least conditionally concede to the ways the homeland views and consumes her, to gracefully undergo the re-categorization that befalls her once she lands in the Dominican Republic. The re-categorization begins with a re-baptism: she is not entitled *Miss Dominican Republic U.S.*, but is given the more elusive title of "Miss Comunidad dominicana en los Estados Unidos" [Miss Dominican Community in the United States]. Why do I call this elusive? It is because the Dominican communities in the United States were, as I have been pointing out, structurally denied during her participation in the *Miss Dominican Republic U.S.* pageant. She was, instead, symbolically tagged with the name of some Dominican municipalities. This intricate game of differentiation and substitution is central to our analysis, because it forces us to engage with the notion of the spectacular that both pageants stage. In other words,

the power of the diasporic candidate possesses a peculiar symbolism in the national pageant, even as her presence is mostly reduced to the economic and media attention it garners. This ritualized “consumption” of the diasporic candidate hints at the intricacies of the “public female performance” and its ties to spectacularity in an age of globalization.

Since 1956 the Dominican Republic has participated in the *Miss Universe* pageant, but it was not until 2003 that, at last, a Dominican woman, Amelia Vega, won. Ms. Vega’s family name is already well known in the Dominican Republic; she is the niece of the famous musician, Juan Luis Guerra. Two years later, in 2005, the pageant organizers created the feeder contest, *Miss República Dominicana U.S.* The idea was realized under Magali Febles, who had gained control of the *Miss Dominican Republic* franchise in 2003. Febles is a native-born Dominican who migrated at an early age to Puerto Rico, where she launched her successful career as a make-up and hair stylist. The sister organization in the United States was created in part as a way of capitalizing on the earning potential of the Dominican diaspora. Febles at the time owned the *Miss Puerto Rico Universe* franchise (which she lost in 2009), and currently owns the *Miss Haiti Universe* as well as the Dominican franchise. There is a certain latent conflict of interest at play here, since these pageants all crown candidates that compete against each other on the highest level for Miss Universe. There is also, for the diasporic candidate, a heavier burden. By choosing to *first* participate in the U.S. Dominican pageant and then participate in the national pageant in Santo Domingo, the diasporic queen must spend much more money than the local Dominican candidates. In addition, the history of the contest since 2005 is discouraging, since none of the candidates representing the Dominican diaspora in the United States have ever won the national crown in the Dominican Republic.

As we have seen from our analysis of the mechanics by which the diasporic Dominican queens are selected and compete, the factors that determine seemingly odd rules in the process can be traced back to the mechanisms of the retrospective illusion one encounters within the broader construction of national imaginaries, which *blur* distinctions between national and diasporic bodies. Balibar’s claim that myth should be seen as “substantial uniformity on the collective and individual levels”¹⁶ seems especially pertinent when analyzing a pageant that very consciously articulates itself in terms of myth in local terrains such as the ones I am analyzing on this chapter. The iconic manifestation of the Dominican Republic and its culture (even if we grant that it is an artifice, specifically manufactured for the purposes of the pageant) speaks of a desire within the collective national imaginary to be both the agent and subject of a larger, perhaps nostalgic narrative, one that will tangentially valorize their collective uniformity while at the same time elevating them to some brief position of supremacy within the global business of the *Miss Universe Organization*. In this sense, by having a *Miss Dominican Republic* compete against beauty queens from other countries within the form dictated by the scenography and propaganda of these pageants has the effect, or pseudo-effect, of making the Dominican Republic itself visible on a global stage. This level of visibility is not usual for matters pertaining to the Dominican Republic and Haiti, which seldom get much play in the media outside Hispaniola. At the same time, the attention is not for anything negative: it is not for earthquakes, coups, disease, refugee problems, or other ways that tend to attach to the image of the Dominican Republic and Haiti when these countries do become the focus of global

media. Neither does the beauty pageant directly evoke its colonial and postcolonial past. It seems to be integrated within a global modernity that elides or obscures the colonial past with its neocolonial aftermath. But it nonetheless inflects Dominican identity within a diaspora that in turn elides into the U.S. and global circuits of capital and media, even though the diasporic bodies “return” to their homeland.

The creation of the *Miss Dominican Republic Universe* pageant and the dual sister *Miss Dominican Republic U.S.* pageant function within an imaginary paradigm of Dominicaness because they both privilege a certain mannered fictive ethnicity that is allergic to any narrative that implies the actual diversity and multicultural, and multi-racial, levels of Dominican national identities, a legacy of its colonial history going back to Hispaniola. As Balibar noted, fictive ethnicity presupposes an ever-static but internally riven notion of a community. In one direction, it is pulled to create an image of a trans-historical unity – in this case mirroring the diaspora with the nation, albeit in a fractured form – and incorporating what is construed as the essence of Dominican social reality. In this direction, the culture of the inhabitants of the diaspora is wholly derivative of the standard set by this image. In another direction, though, it recognizes, at least on an unconscious level, the manifestations of non-place and misrecognition that have traversed both the internal history of the island and the diasporic community. In the “parable” of the sash, which we have explained in detail above, the sash could be seen as a Lacanian “suture,” a process of pseudo-identification in which the imaginary and the symbolic are stitched together. As the psychoanalyst Jacques Alain Miller puts it:

Suture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse; we shall see that it figures there as the element which is lacking, in the form of a stand-in. For, while there lacking, it is not purely and simply absent. Suture, by extension – the general relation of lack to the structure – of which it is an element, inasmuch as it implies the position of a taking-the-place-of.¹⁷

Recall that the sash in question, the sash worn by the diasporic queen who “returns” to a homeland she might *never have seen*, reads as *Miss Dominican Community in the United States*. Here, I want to shift our attention to “community” because, although it is highly present throughout both of the pageants that make up the entirety of the process of selecting a Miss Dominican Republic, it appears to mean entirely different things in both. In one, the community is “instituted by the nation-state,” meaning that the only legitimate community is that which is recognized by the state, by the government of the Dominican Republic. Following this train of thought, when diversity is recognized by the organizers of the pageant, it is only when it is ethnicized and readily categorized as a unit. As Balibar has indicated, “Fictive ethnicity would thus permit that a pre-existing unity is recognized in the state and that the state is continually measured against its historic mission in the service of the nation.”¹⁸ But the absence that is overlaid by the sash in this process of community building is constituted by the sentiments or affects surrounding it: how do Dominicans feel about their compatriots in this figuration of cohabitation between Dominicans and diasporic Dominicans? How is Dominicaness felt as an extension of belonging to a community in both cases? How is Dominican “beauty” mediated within these transactions of fictive ethnicity? I would venture that community and a sense of belonging are split

in both cases. Within the *Miss Dominican Republic Universe* pageant, the appeal of community is attuned to the familiar mechanism of national narratives whereby: “Different social groups are thus represented in the past, present, and future as if they formed a natural community, with a shared identity of origins, culture and interests which transcend individuals and social conditions.”¹⁹ Notice how in this narrative of national construction we are following a linear development in which the notion of community (be it of those Dominicans living in the homeland or the diaspora) is one that must be necessarily sanitized. A case of that sanitizing is presented by the backstage changes undergone by the diasporic queens who arrive to compete in the Dominican Republic; these changes permit the queens to be “accepted” and deemed a part of the community. Hence the title “Miss comunidad dominicana en los Estados Unidos,” displacing the fictitious title under which this queen was crowned. The necessary fiction which legitimates the diasporic queen’s standing in the national contest indicates the real problems that they face as competitors: discrimination based on their inability of speaking Spanish, their choices when it comes to dressing, and their selection of the traditional costumes of their region.

In conjunction with the final questions portion of the pageant the selection of the traditional national costume is another opportunity for the candidate to illustrate their ethnic background. Usually, the costumes selected represent the local traditions and important historical figures of the cities and towns where these beauty queens were raised, but in the case of the *Miss Dominican Republic U.S.* pageants, the selected national costumes shed light onto the complicated materialization of a diasporic consciousness at the time of selecting what would be a *traditional* costume. What region, after all, are they from? What “tradition” are they able to reference with their clothes? In the impossible suspension between authentic Dominicaness and their U.S. origin, they are continually subject to a critique based on a “lack of perceived authenticity” in their choices.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF LIBELL DURAN: THE LIMITS OF BELONGING TO THE DOMINICAN CITY

Throughout this chapter I have been analyzing the impossible process by which *Miss Dominican Republic U.S.* becomes a “representative” facing off against other representatives of local municipalities and communities in the *Miss Dominican Republic Universe* pageant in the Dominican Republic. The final objective governing both pageants is to win the coveted title of *Miss Dominican Republic*, after which the winner competes for the *Miss Universe* crown. As we have shown, the administrative compromises that structure this process reflect the psychodynamics of a deeper anxiety about Dominican identity – ethnic, cultural, racial – both in the diaspora and on the island. That the structure impedes on the practical behavior of the diaspora queens remains to be illustrated in a more concrete way by looking at the particular case of the winner of the *Miss República Dominicana U.S.* 2009, Libell Duran. When Duran participated in the *Miss Dominican Republic U.S.* pageant of 2009, she supposedly represented the municipality of Santiago (Santiago is not only the third largest city in the Dominican Republic, but, as well, the city whose beauty queens have had the most luck in wining the *Miss Dominican Republic Universe* crown).

As *Miss Santiago*, during the competition of the *Miss Dominican Republic U.S.* 2009, Duran's biography emphasized her ties to the Dominican Republic and downplayed her experiences as a first generation Dominican woman born in New Jersey. It is a major flaw of the U.S. pageant that its contestants are unable to emphasize their important diasporic and ethnic experience within the pageant itself. The entire pageant works as a literal imitation of its sister pageant. After her investiture, Duran seemed to be a favorite, given her beauty and poise before the camera. Yet it was her response during the final questions stage of the competition in Santo Domingo that exemplified the kinds of difficulties a diaspora queen faces when trying to navigate the multiple mis-readings of their experiences as Dominican (and Dominican-American) women.

The final questions stage of most beauty pageants is the most challenging and most anticipated portion of these contests. The types and range of questions are similar in both the U.S. and Dominican Republic contests, but the difference in this case is that the contestants from the former pageant are tasked with being equally knowledgeable about the cultural, social, and political issues surrounding their experiences as Dominican women in the United States, and also with regards to the social reality of Dominicans in the Dominican Republic. Because Duran was an excellent candidate, the criticism she was subjected to shows on a large scale the hidden resentments and miscomprehensions to which a diasporic beauty queen is subjected in the Dominican homeland.

The main issue that candidates in the diasporic pageant have to face in the national contest is derived from the ambiguous image of the diasporic Dominican within Dominican national culture. Until very recently the nation had understood these communities as being *dominicanos ausentes* [absent Dominicans]. The complexities of the way "Miss comunidad dominicana en los Estados Unidos" labors under this perception probably surprised Duran. Becoming the embodiment of the Dominican diaspora comes at a very high price because what is expected of these delegates is hardly anything as politically charged as it is for the candidates in the national pageant. For evidence of the difference between the diasporic and the national pageant contestant, we turn to the types of questions Libell Duran had to answer in both pageants, and her responses in both stages illustrates the level of discomfort she was facing.²⁰

In the *Miss Dominican Republic United States* pageant of 2009 the hosts of the pageant posed the final questions and, as has been the case since its inception in 2005, the pageant was not televised although it was hosted and covered by a great number of local television media such as Telemundo/NBC and the local subsidiaries. The then *Miss Santiago*, Libell Duran was asked: "If you had the opportunity to have the president Barack Obama in front of you, what would you ask him to do on behalf of the Dominican community residing in the United States?"²¹ At first sight the question seems like a fairly basic and straightforward inquiry, but if we take a step back and realize that these candidates are not onstage sporting the sash of U.S. cities where large communities of Dominicans reside but instead, as *Miss Santiago*, and are portraying the symbolic representation of Dominican cities in a pageant that indirectly further positions them as outsiders, then the question Libell Duran was tasked with reveals unexpected levels of tension between these multiple national identities, even though ethnically there may be an affinity between Dominicans in the Diaspora and at home. Onstage and up to that point she is the symbolic representation of Santiago, and as such has been responsive to that level of experience, which does not include

thinking about the “issues” affecting the Dominican community in the United States. In this context and for this reason Duran’s response does not seem strange in the least. Her response:

Good evening everyone. As a representative of the Dominican city [sic], I would tell Barack Obama I would help the children [sic], the young people that are studying in colleges in order to have financial support [sic] because the children are our future of tomorrow [sic]. Thank you very much.²²

I would like to emphasize that Duran’s re-imagining of the notion of “comunidad dominicana en Estados Unidos” into a *Ciudad dominicana* [a Dominican city] was consistent with the dialectic of the sash: her answer was in character, even if the character she was playing under the sash was not quite herself. Clearly, there was no real figuration of a U.S. Dominican city here, but Duran’s stiffness, and revealing grammatical slip-up, reflects the fact that she was operating on two levels, one that gave her a fictitious address and status, and another that was addressed to her real status – which constituted “interpellation,” or the hailing of the individual as a certain kind of presupposed national subject. Representing Santiago on this stage, Duran and her questioner were well aware that her real embodiment was elsewhere: on a diasporic Dominican urban landscape that was not being directly recognized on this stage, and that will never be directly recognized in the homeland.

Dominican migrations are seldom discussed outside urban imaginaries and critical studies seldom discuss or analyze the vicissitudes of Dominican migrants in rural areas. Duran’s answer, even if technically wrong, was an implicit commentary on this. Since the U.S. Dominican communities were put in suspense in this pageant, her consolidation of migration as an urban experience indicates, at least for me, that the real cardinal referents in this pageant, which inscribe every sash, are always elsewhere, are in a sense non-places, virtual manifestations of a place of enunciation that these delegates will both bear and bury once they arrive in the Dominican Republic for the national competition. Despite the slip-up in her response Duran was crowned as the *Miss Dominican Republic U.S. 2009* delegate, which allowed her to go on to participate in the *Miss Dominican Republic Universe* pageant of 2009, where her role was accordingly “translated” as the *Miss Comunidad dominicana en Estados Unidos*. During that competition she was once again able to place in the top five, allowing her the possibility to once again compete in the final questions stage of the competition, but at this point Duran was faced with a type of experience she was perhaps not prepared for and it is at this point that we get a glimpse of the ambivalent manifestations of negative and positive affects/effects that still pervade notions of migration in the Dominican Republic and more so how they view the U.S. Dominican communities. If in the diasporic pageant Duran was rightfully tasked with a question that pertained to the Dominican communities in the United States, in the national pageant this would not be the case. The question at that point was posed by the Puerto Rican entertainment journalist and television host, Pedro Juan Figueroa, who asked her: “If you were offered the opportunity to fix a social problem affecting the Dominican Republic, what would it be and why?”²³ Once again the type of question asked interpellates the candidates, and more so if we consider that immigration in the Dominican Republic has been historically deemed as a “social problem.” Particularly if we recall the recent

and ongoing issues pertaining to Haitian migrations to the Dominican Republic, and more specifically after the earthquake of 2010, and the response from the Dominican government. The global attention and criticisms deriving from the court rulings signal some of the complexities of these issues, and they are undoubtedly a present idea in the question that was made to Duran.²⁴ As I have been analyzing here, the delegates that are prepared to represent the Dominican diaspora in the United States are *seldom prepared* to respond to the surrounding milieus that interpret them and categorize them in specific ways in the homeland. Duran's response to the question echoed her previous response:

“Good evening everyone. For me it is a great pleasure to be here with you all. A social problem that has marked my life, I think would to help [sic] all the children in need because they are the future of our tomorrow. If every human being opens their heart and extends their hands, our world would be a more beautiful place. Thank you very much.”²⁵

Duran's response was again a deflection rather than an answer to the question. This time, the refusal to address the question in Dominican terms had a direct result in the outcome of her participation. At least, she earned only the third runner-up position. Even if her answer had been more direct, however, one can ask whether it would have changed anything, since it is possible to view the diasporic person as just the kind of “social problem” the question is asking about. It would be very hard to untangle this knot in the national imaginary.

NATIONAL COSTUMES AND “PROPER” REPRESENTATION: CHANTEL MARTÍNEZ'S REIGN

Chantel Martínez's reign as the *Miss Dominican Republic United States* of 2012 was as memorable as Libell Duran's reign but for different reasons. While Duran's performance was characterized by her unconscious commentary on her place as a Dominican diasporic subject, Martínez seemed to relish her position. Chantel Martínez was born in New York City to Dominican parents. I want to first focus on the choices Chantel made in selecting her national costume for the *Miss Dominican Republic Universe* pageant, reflecting on her conscious representation of the Dominican diaspora. I turn next to her response to the final question portion of the competition that, if placement is any guide, was received more favorably than Duran's. Both of these elements illustrate the level of awareness and desire for proper, ethnically accurate representation of the Dominican diaspora that motivated Chantel Martínez in these pageants. During the 2013 national competition Martínez decided to dress up as Félix Sánchez, a *Dominican Olympic athlete*, as her national costume, which yielded an avalanche of responses in the Dominican Republic, positive and negative.²⁶

The negative responses were often set in discriminatory terms against the Dominican diaspora itself. For example, on a comment posted on Facebook on August 2, 2013, by user Richard Oliver Bido Medina, he indicates:

I do not think it is a national costume that can represent us in the Miss Universe. I have always been proud of the accomplishments of Félix Sánchez, but

an Olympic medal is not something that is necessarily a part or inherent to our identity. In other words, many countries possess Olympic medals, Olympic medals are not a part of our expressions of Dominicaness. I hope you all understand what I am trying to say. The candidate is beautiful and has a lot of charisma in order to be a queen, but the costume is not precisely a good representation of our identity.²⁷

As the representative of the Dominican diaspora (or the embodiment of the Dominican community in the United States) her choice cleverly played on the fact that Sánchez himself represented both the Dominican Republic and the United States in different stages of the Olympics; and, also like Martínez, he was a U.S.-born Dominican. The Facebook critic rather unfairly spared Sánchez and criticized Martínez for identity manipulation. This reflects the fact that as a male athlete, Sánchez was given noticeably more flexibility when it came to the self-definition of his *dominicanidad* than is accorded to the female beauty queens. The commenter above alluded to lines of ownership of a national imaginary of Dominicaness when he refers to an “us” (the authentic Dominicans who hold the true essence of a national expression) and an unnamed “them” which includes Chantel Martínez and to some degree Félix Sánchez.

In his comments, Bido Medina quite surprisingly posits beauty pageants (such as the Miss Universe) within the same paradigm of Olympic games. This is unusual since one is seen as an athletic competition and other is usually deemed as a superficial exposition of female objectification. Ironically enough the common denominator, and implied criticism from this comment, is that both Félix Sánchez and Chantel Martínez were not born in the Dominican Republic, and thus the comment of this costume not being “un traje nacional para representarnos en el Miss Universo” seems to want to enforce standards for what is deemed to be Dominican and what is not that are clearly tied to geography and birthplace. So the gender crossing as such was not considered important. The fact that both Sánchez and Martínez are embodiments of the Dominican diaspora and that both are, to varying degrees, contributing to the cultural development and visibility of the Dominican Republic outside of the geographical confines of the homeland is overlooked by the critic. The usage of “*dominicanidad*” here reminds us of the continuing effect of the ideology set during the Trujillo regime, when *Dominicanidad* was tied to whitewashing, invisibility of migration, and within a specific social class (the ruling upper class). Lastly, the positive and negative connotations that the commentator associates within the representation of Félix Sanchez as a national costume in the Miss Universe begs the question of what constitutes a “good representation”?

In the final questions portion of the 2012 pageant, Martínez chose to convey, rather boldly, a sense of presence and awareness of the type of rejection she received in the national stage – although the way her question was formed gave her, perhaps, no choice. The question was: “From the distance of New York and other countries, the Dominican Republic looks very far away. What would you do to make your country feel closer to where you all live?” (my translation). It is peculiar that in the formulation of the question there is once again a strategic distancing between an “us” and “them,” the kind interpellation we have noticed earlier that names the addressee as, somehow, a foreigner. Martínez’s response took up the implicit challenge to her

legitimacy on that stage by refusing to deny her existence, or make it subservient to some more authentic Dominican subject-hood, while clearly naming the links that bind the diaspora to the Dominican Republic:

You know me being born there [sic], for me it is a bit difficult because I cannot visit the country every time I want. [I] am studying and working [over there]. But what allows us to feel closer [sic] are the phone calls, the social networks, [and] being able to speak with people that are far away from you and that you cannot visit as easily. But, you can always call them. I think that in a way I always return to my country; also by being able to look at photographs, and, what else? I think that is all.²⁸

Inscribing her personal story in the response and directly emphasizing the many reasons why Dominicans have had to migrate outside of the homeland, Martínez managed to provide a more nuanced response than it might at first appear. Implicit here was the fact that, within the current social reality of the Dominican Republic, it is hard for young people such as Martínez, who do not come from elite families, to gain the kind of education and employment that would let them advance socially and economically. If the question contained an undercurrent of hostility that de-legitimized the diasporic queen's status, the answer contained an undercurrent of protest that questioned the legitimacy of the social order's frozen hierarchy.

My main argument in this chapter has been centered on the hermeneutic politics of the diaspora as they are performed in the *Miss Dominican Republic United States* pageant and its sister pageant the *Miss Dominican Republic Universe* pageant. Although a beauty pageant might seem marginal to the larger cultural processes that govern the Dominican diaspora, it is, in actuality, horizontal to the everyday life and attitudes of Dominicans in the United States and *in* the Dominican Republic. As I have illustrated, the crossed readings and mis-readings that govern the categorization of the *Miss Dominican Community in the United States* involves displacements that reflect larger issues of authenticity that problematize notions of Dominicanness. The performance space allotted to the diasporic queens is not at all related to what they really represent culturally and socially as an extension of the United States. They are instead seen as consumable commodities since they take with them to the homeland all the sponsorship acquired in the U.S. pageant. Even though the term "performance," as Edmondson proposes, implies agency as an act to do particular kinds of work or make kinds of statements, in the case of Libell Duran and Chantel Martínez and their decisions (even if unconsciously) to fully represent the diaspora are not acts that can be easily absorbed by the national pageants nor in the Dominican Republic (as seen in the comments elicited from Martínez's national costume). The prime example of this is that up to this date *no* diasporic delegate has won the national crown. I believe that the relative absence of a winner of the *Miss Dominican Republic Universe* pageant that represents the Dominican diaspora (in the United States or in any region outside of the geographic confines of the island) alludes to the politics of Dominican nationalism that still pervade the mind-set of many Dominicans. This is especially true because a large portion of the conservative faction of the island still define nationality under the tenuous rubrics of an authentic ideal. It is perhaps due to this that up to now there has been no attempt to incorporate the cultural connections

between Haiti and the Dominican Republic (no doubt evoking colonial and post-colonial ties) in the same way as that of the Dominican communities in the United States. In other words, no mention has been made to create an opportunity in which the voices of a Dominican-Haitian delegate could be heard. This is a bit peculiar if we remember that Magali Febles owns the franchise of the *Miss Dominican Republic Universe* and of the *Miss Haiti Universe* pageants and she herself is a representation of the Dominican diaspora in Puerto Rico, where she has lived for most of her life. I make a mention of this not to downgrade the potential of collaboration and diversity that these inclusions could potentially represent, but to critically illustrate the lack of real engagement that is made when incorporating any of these delegates and their diasporic lived experiences in a national pageant that is more intent on consuming their capital and potential sponsorship than really recognizing them as central elements of the always evolving national imaginaries of the Dominican Republic.

ENDNOTES

1. See for example, Sarah Banet-Weiser's, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999); and Colleen Ballerino Cohen, Richard Wilk, and Beverly Stoeltje's, *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage: Gender, Contests, and Power* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
2. Belinda Edmondson, "Public Spectacles: Caribbean Women and the Politics of Public Performance." *Small Axe* 7.1 (2003): 2.
3. For an in-depth analysis of these processes see Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel's *Caribe Two Ways: Cultura de la migración en el Caribe insular hispánico* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2002) and Ginetta E.B. Candelario's *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
4. Silvio Torres-Saillant, "The Tribulations of Blackness: Stages in Dominican Racial Identity." *Latin American Perspectives* 25 (1998): 126–145.
5. Silvio Torres-Saillant, "Creoleness or Blackness: A Dominican Dilemma." *Plantation Society* 5.1(1998): 35.
6. *Ibid.*, 31.
7. *Ibid.*, 32.
8. Candelario, *Black Behind the Ears*, 258.
9. See Lauren Derby's detailed analysis of black racial constructions in Dominican national discourses as they materialized during Rafael L. Trujillo's dictatorship in her study, *The Dictator's Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
10. Silvio Torres-Saillant, *El retorno de las yolas: ensayos sobre diáspora, democracia y dominicanidad* (Santo Domingo: Editora Manatí, 1999), 31.
11. *Ibid.*, 31.
12. Peggy Levitt, "Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion." *International Migration Review* 32(1998): 928.
13. For a more elaborate analysis of diaspora and Dominican migration studies refer to my monograph, *Narratives of Migration and Displacement in Dominican Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
14. Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, Alys Eve Weinbaum, Lynn M. Thomas, Priti Ramamurthy, Uta G. Poiger, and Madeleine Yue Dong, eds., *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 4–5.

15. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 96.
16. *Ibid.*, 97.
17. Jacques A. Miller, "Suture: Elements of the Logic of the Signifier." *The Symptom: Online Journal of Lacan.com*, 8(2007). http://www.lacan.com/symptom8_articles/miller8.html
18. Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class*, 96.
19. *Ibid.*, 96.
20. Full recordings of these pageants can be found on *YouTube*. I am transcribing and translating the fragments related to Duran's and Martínez's participation.
21. (Original question in Spanish): "¿Si tuvieras la oportunidad de tener al presidente Barack Obama al frente tuyo qué le pedirías a favor de la comunidad dominicana en los Estados?"
22. (Original response in Spanish): "Muy buenas noches a todos. Como representante de la ciudad dominicana, yo le diría a Barack Obama que ayudaría (sic) a los niños, a los jóvenes que están estudiando en la universidad para tener fondos porque nuestros niños son el futuro de mañana (sic). Muchísimas gracias."
23. (Original question in Spanish): "Si a usted le ofrecieran la oportunidad de arreglar un problem social en República Dominicana, ¿cuál sería y por qué?"
24. In 2013, more than 200,000 people were affected by a historic ruling by the Dominican Constitutional Court denying citizenship rights to Dominicans born in the Dominican Republic to undocumented Haitian migrants. The ruling was ostensibly aimed at controlling undocumented immigration from Haiti, which increased since the 2010 earthquake. One of the most controversial components of this ruling is that it is retroactively applied to 1929.
25. (Original response in Spanish): "Muy buenas noches a todos. Para mí es un gran placer estar aquí presente con ustedes. Un problema social que a mí me ha marcado la vida, pienso sería ayudar a todos los niños porque ellos son el futuro de nuestro mañana. Si cada ser humano abre su corazón y extiende sus manos, el mundo sería más bonito. Muchísimas gracias."
26. A brief biographical overview of Sánchez would allow us to see how much in common he has with Martínez, and how the symbolic dimension in which both operate would make him a natural inspiration for a national costume in 2012. Sánchez, an American track and field athlete of Dominican descent and who has mostly represented the Dominican Republic in international competitions such as the Olympics and the World Championships, is one of the most famous representatives of the diaspora. He won the Olympic gold medal twice, once in 2004 and the other in 2012. This in itself is a historic feat for the Dominican Republic, and the fact that a U.S.-born Dominican attained it is even more significant. As recognition of these feats the Dominican Republic's largest stadium, The Félix Sánchez Olympic Stadium, is named after him. Like Martínez, he was born in New York City, but he was raised in San Diego. During the 2012 Olympic games held in Greece, Sánchez became the oldest man to win the Olympic 400 meters hurdles title. He was the only gold Olympic medal for the Dominican Republic and that same year secured his second gold medal.
27. (Original quote in Spanish): "No creo que sea un traje nacional para representarnos en el Miss Universo. Siempre he estado orgulloso de los logros de Félix Sánchez, pero una medalla olimpica no es algo precisamente propio o inherente a nuestra identidad, es decir, muchos países poseén medallas olimpicas, las medallas olimpicas no son un expresiønn de la dominicanidad. Espero darme a entener. La miss es hermosa y tiene mucho carisma para ser reina, pero el traje no es precisamente una buena expresiønn de nuestra identidad."
28. (Original quote in Spanish): "Sabes que yo naciendo allá, (sic) para mí se me hace un poquito difícil ya que no puedo visitar el país cada vez que quiero. [Yo] estoy estudiando y estoy trabajando [allá]. Pero, lo que a nosotros nos acerca más es (sic) las llamadas, las

redes sociales, [y] poder hablar con esa persona que tu la tienes lejos y a veces no la puedes visitar. Pero, puedes llamar. Pienso que en un sentido yo siempre vuelvo a mi país; también viendo fotos y, ¿qué más? Creo que eso es todo.”

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PART III

RELIGIOUS IMAGININGS



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CHAPTER NINE

“POSTCOLONIAL REMAINS”

Critical religion, postcolonial theory, and deconstructing the secular–religious binary¹



Timothy Fitzgerald

INTRODUCTION

According to Robert J. C. Young, the purpose of postcolonial theory is “to reconstruct Western knowledge formations, reorient ethical norms, turn the power structures of the world upside down, and refashion the world from below.”² However, in order to reconstruct western knowledge formations, we need to deconstruct the categories of the understanding that are foundational to the production of western knowledge. Young has usefully discussed some of these, such as “race,” “ethnicity,” and “the other.” One of the foundational categories not directly addressed in much postcolonial discourse (including Young’s) is the “non-religious secular.” In this chapter I attempt to examine some of the fault-lines in postcolonial theory in relation to work in “critical religion” on the historical origins and ideological function of the modern religion–secular binary.³

This lack of critical awareness of the service that the “non-religious secular” offers the myths of liberal political economy is not only evident in Young’s argument; it also appears in Edward Said’s assumption of secularism as the starting point of his own positionality. I place the critique of Orientalism stemming from Edward Said and permeating postcolonial theory into a wider discourse on civility and barbarity. What Said calls Orientalism is a specific construction of this wider colonial and neo-colonial discourse. Academics, politicians, and media pundits, even while purportedly questioning dominant knowledge formations, rhetorically deploy categories such as religion, politics, and secularity in ways that recuperate and reconstruct the modern version of the civility–barbarity discourse. Whatever the intentions of the authors, the illusions of secular modernity are widely constructed in academic and public discourse by a binary oscillation between “secular civility” and “religious barbarity.” The paradox is that Said himself fails to draw out the tacit if muted Orientalism of his own secular positionality. Said interrogated the colonial associations between Orientals and barbarity, and provided us with powerful insights into the relation between power and knowledge. Yet he does not seem to have fully understood how the modern constructions of religion and religions has worked rhetorically to privilege secular reason, and to make secular knowledge appear as though it is in conformity with the

commonsense nature of things. Deployment of religion in both colonial and metropolitan power centers has been a technique to delegitimize and contain local practices and values that impede or obstruct liberal capitalism. As a colonial and neo-colonial classification device, the religion–secular binary has quietly constructed the superior rationality of liberal secular (male) reason.

EDWARD SAID AND SECULAR CRITICISM

It seems significant that empathetic but critical writers such as William D. Hart, Aamir Mufti, and Jil Anidjar have had to work hard to unearth the meaning and deployment of such foundational concepts as religion and secular in Said's work. For example Hart has pointed out that Said "conceives of his own task as secular criticism," and thus his critique of modern culture is predicated on the religion–secularism distinction.⁴ Hart tells us that

In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said criticises the "return of repressed religiosity" in contemporary critical theory. . . . He notes the triumph of uncritical religiosity. . . . What concerns him most about this "curious veering towards the religious" are its political implications. . . . Against this religious trend, he calls for critical, secular renewal. (150)

Said describes the critic as engaged in a "truly secular enterprise." In this passage we can see that "the religious," "religiosity," "this religious trend" are placed in opposition to politics, thus re-inscribing the religion–secular binary, without needing to specify what either side of the binary actually is or refers to.

Talking about Marx, Said, and the Jewish Question, Hart refers to "the three interlocking themes of this study: the religious effects of culture, the religious seduction of the secular critic, and the return of repressed religiosity" (143).

The first of these raises the problem of knowing how to distinguish religion from culture, and I have argued extensively in my own work that on any typical deployment of these terms it is impossible. What putatively religious fact about people's practices is not also a cultural fact? To put a cause–effect relationship between two unknowns ("the religious *effects* of culture") seems problematic.

The second raises the question how we can discriminate between a religious and a secular seduction (or any other practice). And the third deploys the ugly word "religiosity." Historically, religiosity and secularity are concepts invented by social scientists to represent the unique, essential, experiential quality of each imagined domain. They are mutually exclusive. The historical conditions and genesis of this ideological binary have been forgotten, and in both liberal and Marxist thought the secular has been normalized as the really real, in comparison to the blind superstitious faith of religion.

My purpose is to show that this secular–religion binary in its various powerful modes is fundamental to the illusions of liberal capitalism and its supposed commonsense conformity with the real nature of the world.⁵ It is on such an illusion that political economy, international relations, and the social sciences are based. This binary normalizes liberal political economy (liberal capitalism) by identifying it with secular reason in contrast to so-called religious madness. Practices and dispositions

that resist global capitalist extraction of surplus value often get classified as religious fundamentalism, extremism, and irrationality. The religion–secular binary is a tool for making exploitation seem normal and inevitable. And like all hegemonic discourses its power is not only conscious and explicit, as in written constitutions, the deliberations of courts, or the annoyance of newspaper editors who believe the secular state is under threat if a Bishop’s moral discourse becomes too “political.”⁶ This binary oscillation is shadowed by other binaries – for example that the role of Bishops is to provide family morality and to save peoples’ “souls,” while the job of politicians and newspaper editors is to deal with the more substantial reality of material thriving and conflicts of interest. In most discursive reproductions, the power of this either-or binary is greater in that it is largely unconscious, even persisting like an undetected virus in the texts of postcolonial theorists.

It can also be added here briefly that Marxist-derived theories of socialism are hampered by similar illusions of secular reason as liberalism. Marxist critiques of liberal political economy cannot do the full job because they are also mystified by the othering of religion as supernatural faith in distinction from the real world of socialist secular science.⁷ For instance, Hart says about Said that “Marxist ideas deeply influence his thinking. As I interpret him, Said reinstates Marx’s claim that ‘the premise of all criticism is the criticism of religion’ . . .” (ix). But I suggest that Marx himself, as well as Said and Hart, did not grasp that the distinction itself is a power formation. Liberal critics have referred to Marxism itself as a religion or irrational faith, with the party as the church and the future communist society as heaven or the “Promised Land.” They thus critique Marxism as essentially no different from a religious faith, as an illusion based on fictions, and compare it with the empirical observational methods of secular science – in which they of course include liberal and neoliberal economics. Liberals also critique what they see as the Marxist reification of class, social forces, and history, and compare these fictions unfavorably with their own foundational concepts, such as the Individual, self-regulating markets, nation-states, and the end of history. Yet none of these foundational liberal (or Marxist) concepts is derivable from empirical experience. Wrapped in the protective rhetorical clothing of secular science, they fashion a fictional world that appears as real. On this basis, the secular faith postulates of both liberalism and Marxism seem indistinguishable from what typically gets consigned to the religion side of the binary. They are both equally matters of faith and hope. The problem then is that if everything is religion then nothing is.

Marx and Engels, and other powerful followers such as Lenin and probably most of the Marxist tradition, represent themselves as scientific secular. They do not deny that liberal capitalism also makes claims to be based on scientific secular knowledge, only that the liberal capitalist version of secular science is more mystified than Socialist scientific secularism. Uncritical Marxism, like uncritical liberalism, is deeply invested in the mystique of “scientific rationality,” though they understand it differently.

Thus liberals and Marxists both posit the secular as the domain of scientific objectivity, and each claims to have the authentic version of it. They have different paradigms of the secular and secular knowledge. What unites liberals and Marxists generally is the faith that secularity is rational knowledge of the real world, as compared to “religion” and its irrational faith based fantasies. What liberals and Marxists have failed to do is to understand the ideological function of the secular – or rather

the ideological function of the religion–secular binary. Neither religion nor the secular are stand-alone categories. They together form a single oscillating trope. It is either religion or it is secular; it cannot be both. This either-or oscillation makes each half of an empty binary parasitic on the other for its semantic content. According to Hart:

Where Marx speaks with confidence when he says that “*the criticism of religion* has largely been completed”, Said is not so sure. . . . For him, there are signs everywhere of a “return of the repressed” – an irruption, in ostensibly critical circles, of repressed religiosity. . . . It is against this cultural and critical drift (where the critique of religion as the premise of criticism has been forgotten) that Said conceives his own project as secular criticism. (ix/x)

Again Hart’s interpretation of Said uncritically re-inscribes the problematic categories in their binary formation. The return of the repressed is reminiscent (among other things) of “religion’s return from exile” suggested by writers in International Relations (see endnote 24 for some references) who imagine religion as an agent with malevolent intentions. The point is that as long as I conceive of my own positionality as *non-religious*, then I am ever indebted to religion. If the criticism of religion ever gets completed, then the notion of *secular* criticism will be meaningless.

The identity of the secular critic is parasitic on what it is not, viz. religion. In sum, both the liberal and the socialist versions of the secular real are themselves founded on illusions.⁸

COLONIAL AND NEO-COLONIAL HEGEMONY

Postcolonial theorists, critical Marxists, and post-Marxists have been empowered by a Gramscian concept of hegemony to good effect. One crucial aspect of the relations of power in a neo-colonial/postcolonial context, as also in the context of direct colonial rule, is cognitive hegemony. This is a situation in which the categories of the colonizing elites – in our contemporary times, the case of liberal secular citizens of the first world, for example, the belief in free markets, in natural rights of the individual such as the right to unlimited private accumulation, in the form of the nation-state or the procedures of representative democracy – have come to appear as normal, natural, and inevitable. As a result of two centuries of liberal propaganda, they appear as commonplaces. Thus, for instance, Islamophobia sweeping western liberal societies is blithely endorsed by the uncritical presuppositions of liberalism and secularism. These dominant categories, which are fervently believed by liberals to constitute the civility and rationality of modern progress, can and often are used by the first-world to justify a whole range of interventions in various societies that, because it does not recognize them in its own customs of classification, can be deemed undeveloped, perhaps even failed states, backward, non-modern, and uncivilized.

I have argued in several publications that the religion–secular binary is, in its simplicity and flexibility, a powerful ideological operator in the maintenance of the illusions of secular reason. It is a hegemonic construct that serves the interests of capital while appearing to offer all of us liberation from an irrational religious past, with an equal share in democratic government. The deployment of this binary actually defines the rationality of liberal secular democracies and their institutions. Not

only government; by accepting the mystification of “secular” status, universities (like courts) in effect serve the interests of capital while thinking themselves to be neutral and objective in their knowledge practices. In Althusser’s terms they are ideological state apparatus.⁹ Secular liberal government appears to offer democracy through universal suffrage; agencies like the media and the education system obfuscate the real relations of power.

THE LIBERAL SECULAR INVENTION OF CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER WORLD RELIGIONS

To fully understand the basis of secular reason in the modern, liberal state, let us briefly examine the assumption that “Christianity” has always been “a religion.”

There is no such thing as “Christianity” except as a peculiarly modern theoretical abstraction – a world religion invented¹⁰ in order to clear a standpoint for secular reason – a dependency based on binary mutual exclusion. “Christianity” is a retrospective (Protestant) liberal reification of a complex history, much of it consisting of violent contestations between factions and power formations. The naming of an imaginary abstraction called Christianity is part of the same essentialized “othering” that produced all the so-called world religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Confucianism and so on – as species of the same (undefined) genus, members of the same kind, all apparently sharing the same necessary characteristics of “religion” itself, all of them phenomenal embodiments of an elusive essence. These religions constitute what the secular is not, and thus simultaneously invest the secular with a misplaced concreteness that has no clearly identifiable content. The claim that the religion–secular dichotomy has always been part of “Christianity” is further weakened by the problem of translating the modern vernacular terms religion and secular back into medieval or Roman Latin; and also because even in the vernacular these terms radically shifted their dominant meanings, first after the Reformation, and then again during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹¹ Thus, as the older dominant discourse on “our Christian civility” as against “their pagan barbarity” gradually shifted, by the mid-nineteenth century a newer version had established itself – “our secular civility” as against “their religious barbarity.” Furthermore, as liberal categories of belief, such as possessive individualism,¹² free markets, and progress, became promoted in the context of colonial power and the demand for efficient extraction of surplus value, these terms developed a different meaning than they had in earlier historical junctures. This transition clearly reflects the emergence of liberal theories of government and political economy, and of the natural and social sciences.¹³

The “othering” of non-Christian humanity as pagan barbarity had been well established by the Catholic Church before the Reformation. The Protestant reformers in turn “othered” Catholic pagan superstition. By the seventeenth century, a new basis for universal supremacy emerged with Cartesian rationalism, Hobbes’ and Locke’s myths of “man in the state of nature,” and Locke’s liberal empiricism. The growth in imperial power transformed the emergence of individualism and free market ideology into today’s globalizing Neoliberal doctrine. It is telling that even Edward Said, whose brilliant exposure of Orientalism showed how knowledge and power cannot be separated, did not seem especially interested in the way the term “religious” is used to classify the other as barbarous and irrational by the civilized liberal democracies

that pride themselves on their secular objectivity.¹⁴ In sum, I find it odd that writers of Said's and Young's critical acuity could not see that, by failing to directly address or problematize the operation of the religion–secular binary in their thinking, and by implicitly or explicitly identifying themselves as secular critics, they implicitly and explicitly reproduce a discourse that protects the illusions of secular liberalism from critique, and ends up projecting the religious other as the irrational barbarian. Let us now turn to a case study of a postcolonial analysis that reveals the problematic results of trying to separate religion from so-called non-religious politics.

ALPA SHAH ON TRANSCENDING THE CATEGORIES OF MODERNITY

Alpa Shah seems to have come close to my position in a discussion of Ranajit Guha's seminal *Elementary Aspects of a Peasant Insurgency* (1983).¹⁵ She has proposed on the basis of her own ethnography that in a peasant insurgent movement in India "it was the very integration of politics, religion and economics that the converts sought against their segregation."¹⁶ Shah did fieldwork in the tribal areas of northeast India and discovered that, while the secular Maoists (Naxalites) have an intimate and long-standing relationship with villagers, they are less successful at recruiting converts to their cause than the "religious" *Shiv Charcha* movement. The latter involves the worship of the god Shiva, vegetarianism, abstention from alcohol, and other personal sacrifices. Given the encroachment on their lands and destruction of their way of life by outside capitalist interests since colonial times and continuing up to the present, why didn't the peasants join and support the Maoist resistance movement with its "political" goals, with greater enthusiasm and in more numbers? This question seemed urgent and noteworthy to Shah because the local Naxalites had been recruiting for some decades with tenuous success, whereas when the *Shiv Charcha* movement began more recently, it recruited much more easily and quickly while making considerable demands on ritual prescriptions and personal sacrifice. Shah explains this phenomenon in this striking account:

One of the most striking things I observed was the contrast between the relatively fluid commitment of local people to the Maoists – a Marxist Leninist vanguard party, also called the Naxalites, that for more than forty years had been carrying on a struggle to overthrow the Indian state in the march to a communist society – and their apparent overnight transformation into committed devotees of Shiv Charcha, a sect to the Hindu Lord Shiv that was spreading amongst low castes and tribes.

. . . In contrast to the Maoists, devotees of Shiv appeared to rapidly change even the most intimate of their daily bodily practices upon joining the sect. They stopped eating meat and drinking alcohol and began bathing daily. They stopped appeasing the village ghosts and spirits and giving them sacrifices of chickens, and they stopped all practices related to witchcraft. Instead they congregated for nocturnal gatherings in the village vicinity, held at least twice a week, to express their devotion to the Mahadev Shiv and his local messengers. Chanting devotional songs, they waited for Shiv to possess one of the followers and give his wisdom on the troubles of the day. These transformations in many ways marked

a rupture rather than continuity with village life. Though this “conversion” was not necessarily permanent (people could and did give up devotion), over the year and a half that I lived in this guerrilla stronghold I saw the popularity of *Shiv Charcha* grow, with significant consequences.

From a typically secular analytical viewpoint, *Shiv Charcha* would likely be regarded by those working within secularist assumptions as a “religious” movement and therefore as mystified escapism, or as politics disguised in a “religious” idiom, as *religious mystification* of what are *really* political issues. Here Shah complicates and challenges these modes of classification.

Shah is appreciative of Ranajit Guha’s work. *Elementary Aspects of a Peasant Insurgency* has been a foundational text for Subaltern Studies. Furthermore, Guha moved the analysis productively forward by acknowledging the significance of such movements in terms of the real agency of peasants in confronting their real conditions and the causes. Shah points out that for Guha,

... such movements marked a history of political consciousness, of agency and action of people against their domination. Peasants in these movements, while often acting in a religious idiom, were aware of their own world, had a conscious will to change it, and acted with a sovereignty, consistency and logic to do so.¹⁷

However, she criticizes Guha for not going far enough in his analysis: “in introducing religious dimensions but keeping them at the margins, Guha did not go far enough in his critique of secular politics for the political significance of what the people he focuses on were doing.”

The point that Shah makes, as outlined above, is that the peasant movements were in effect a protest against the standard, western or bureaucratic, outside classification system itself, and the alienating effects made in their lives by the division between the putatively “religious” aspects and the putatively “secular” aspects. The ease and enthusiasm with which they turned to the *Shiv Charcha* practices and away from the secular Maoist Naxalites did not imply a turn towards “religion” but a turn towards a holistic, transformative, collective reintegration of their lives. The success and popularity of the *Shiv Charcha* was its transcendence of state classifications that marginalized half their lives by reinventing it as a “religion.”

According to Shah, it was the result of the alienating effects of the colonial separation of “religion” from the totality of their lived experience, and of the introduction of secular capitalist political economy, which in turn exacerbated their alienation:

Tracing the precise local effects of the separation of religion from the politico-economic domains is one part of the story of alienation. The other was the great strain on social relations, particularly inter-generational ones, brought by agrarian change and the acceleration of processes of capitalism in the region.¹⁸

This argument is consistent with a strand of my own opposition to liberal ideology, made in a succession of books and journal articles, about the alienating effects of the imaginary separation of supposedly “otherworldly” religion from supposedly this-worldly politics.¹⁹ I have suggested that this aspect of alienation is at the heart

of modern liberal secularist dogma. However, it needs to be borne in mind that, by problematizing the religion–secular binary, one cannot then reproduce the same terms as though they are neutral, unproblematic, commonsense descriptive or analytical concepts.²⁰ To deploy terms like “religion” or “politics” is not innocent, however intuitively normal they seem in their deployment. Thus, to say that the Naxalites take themselves to have a secular Marxist or Maoist position might be a statement of fact about their own self-representation. To claim to be involved in secular politics is an ideological assertion, implying that it is non-religious, which in turn elicits the substitute binaries (faith–knowledge, other world–this world, pie-in-the sky metaphysics as against a robust grip on the really real). To take secular politics as a neutral descriptive term is part of the ideological illusion, one that the Naxalites have derived from colonial categories, but that the participants in *Shiv Charcha* wish to abandon and transcend. Following this line of thought is also to say that the post-colonial project of “provincializing Europe,” to borrow Dipesh Chakrabarty’s productive expression,²¹ cannot be completed until the Eurocentric categorical binary of religion and secular politics has also been critically deconstructed. The othering of some imaginary category of irrational faith serves to consolidate the illusion that secular reason is itself not a system of faith postulates, but is uniquely in tune with the real nature of things.

WHAT IS “POLITICS” AND THE “POLITICAL”?

Robert Young describes postcolonial theory as a “political project,” but what does this mean? What would be a non-political project? If one pays attention to the very wide range of deployments of the term “politics” and “political” in Anglophone discourse, it becomes apparent that virtually anything can be and is described as political.²² “Politics” and “political” as terms are widely and routinely deployed as though they stand for a universally intuited aspect of human relations among all peoples and at all periods of history. Given the over-stretched ubiquity of the term “politics,” and the analytically distinct meanings that it deploys and confuses, it is telling that in postcolonial studies this term often serves as an ideological operator masquerading as a neutral and disinterested descriptor.

Robert Young, for instance, uses the terms “politics” and “political” 48 times in an article with around 20 pages of text. The reader is supposed to understand intuitively the meaning of politics and political in each case and context. However – and this is not only Young’s problem, for it is normal and ubiquitous – the term has such a wide and indiscriminate deployment that it is difficult if not impossible to discern any specific meaning or reference, beyond the empty term “power” or “conflicts of interest.” If everything is political, then nothing is.²³ Young tries to come to grips with the problem of these modern categories, but they slip and slide, as in this paragraph:

On the assumption that Al Qaeda and fundamentalisms of various kinds can all be identified with each other and identified with the return of religion to the sphere of the political, one major response has involved an interest in secularism. . . . The problem, however, with much work on secularism has been that it begins from a stance that is already committed to secularism itself. This means that it takes a position within the political as well as philosophical

spectrum of the very situation that it seeks to resolve, for the separation of the religious from the worldly is exactly what is being contested. (30)

Here Young refers to “the return of religion to the sphere of the political,” an expression that echoes “the return of repressed religiosity”; or some of the language deployed in International Relations, referring to “religion’s exile” since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 (a peace that some argue was the foundation for the modern system of secular nation states) but then “its” return from exile, particularly since 9/11, and “its” violent disruption of the peaceful secular state.²⁴ This myth constructs “religion” as a thing, an essence, and even as an agent that constitutes a danger to the secular state and the international order and has therefore needed to be “othered,” an idea echoed in a passage in which Young is actually attempting to draw attention to the underlying problem, viz. that: “the separation of the religious from the worldly is exactly what is being contested.” Paradoxically the juxtaposition and binary oscillation of empty terms such as ‘the religious’ and ‘the worldly’ that have no clear content or contexts here creates a powerful rhetorical illusion of essential difference. The problem is precisely to know what “the religious” and “the worldly,” or the implicitly secular, mean, and how they are distinguished.²⁵

I am not sure if Young is saying that “the assumption” that he refers to is a general assumption made by others, or that he personally makes this assumption. In any case, he does not deconstruct the terminology of religion, of “it,” of the “sphere of the political,” of “a position within the political.” Nor, when he says that “the separation of the religious from the worldly is exactly what is being contested” does he say if *he* is contesting that, and what it means to say so. To contest the separation of religion from the world implies holding a theory about what “religion” and “world” mean. Is “religion” really not of this world? And where does “the world” begin and end? What exactly is its referent? Some clarity on these issues requires the critical deconstruction of modern categories that, like unanalyzed remains, permeate Young’s text and presumably his thinking.

RELIGION AS A FORCE FOR GOOD OR BAD IN THE WORLD

Postcolonial theorists would not wish to find themselves aligned with liberals such as Christopher Hitchens and Tony Blair. These two did a televised debate with the title “Is Religion a Force for Good in the World?”²⁶ Note how “religion” is reified in the title as a “force,” as though there were any such *thing* called “religion” to act as a force. The belief in religion as an agent of good or bad intent is a modern superstition itself. Hitchens believes that this “force” is always bad. Tony Blair, a Catholic, thinks that some religions can do good in the world – but only the kind of religion that does not challenge the liberal view of things. The rest is bad religion, “a perversion of faith.”

The title of the debate on its own tells us a great deal about modern secular discourse. Religion is taken to be a force, a thing, even an intentional agent in the world. It is an agent that can potentially do good or bad. Like an invisible occult power, an avatar from another world, “religion” takes on various manifestations and forms: “religions,” “faiths,” and “spiritualities.” Belief in “religion” is not based on any

empirical evidence, but is *a priori*. Blair and Hitchens both know, or think they know, instantly and intuitively what is and is not a religion. How do they know this? In this they are apparently better informed than Micah Schwartzman, a constitutional expert whose detailed review of US Supreme Court rulings since the 1790s on the interpretation of the US Constitution's religion clauses concludes that, though the Constitution declares that religious and secular beliefs and practices *must be* distinct, yet there exist no clear and available criteria for so distinguishing them.²⁷ They must be, but they cannot be.

Though Blair and fellow liberal Christopher Hitchens disagree about whether religion can ever be a force for good in the world, they do not question the existence of such a metaphysical agency. Faith in the existence of religion and religions that can act as a force in the world is not essentially different from faith in occult agencies that transcend the empirically observable.²⁸ Even though Hitchens claims to be a non-believer, both he and Blair tacitly adhere to an incarnational theology in which "religion" exists as an unseen noumenal essence that manifests itself phenomenologically in "religions" and "world religions." They both know that religion causes violence. Yet there are no observational sightings for this reified causation, or indeed for any of its supposed incarnations. These are abstract classifications that organize the world in ways that rhetorically embed the illusions of secular reason, not descriptions of objectively existing realities. Yet Blair has faith that "religion" acts in the world in good or bad ways. "Failed states" are frequently identified with barbarous and irrational religion, what Blair refers to as an "abuse of religion" and a "perversion of faith," and typically though not exclusively used to refer to "Islam" and "terrorism." Blair writes in the *Observer* (25 Jan 2014) about the "ghastly roll of terror attacks in the obvious places" – which he lists as Syria, Libya, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, and Pakistan. He asserts "there is one thing *self-evidently* in common"²⁹ in all these different cases, which is that the ". . . acts of terrorism are perpetrated by people motivated by an abuse of religion. It is a perversion of faith." Blair's claim to know what proper religion is appears to derive not so much from his Catholic faith in the Trinity, in the miracle of transubstantiation, or in Mary the Mother of God, as from his liberal secular faith in the transcendental fiction "religion" and its compatibility (or not) with liberal secular civility. Secular knowledge is presumed not to be itself a perversion of faith, but the neutral and objective bedrock for level-headed analysis. It is the supposedly reasonable ground from which "religions" can be identified, assessed, and either given approval or found wanting. Secular academics today avoid the terms "pagan" or "barbarous," yet the term "religion" is not truly neutral or objective, but a wide-open category for the disposal of basket cases, which means most of what doesn't qualify as the normality of rational liberal secular.

CRITICAL RELIGION

This question of the othering of "religion" invites a brief exposition of what a growing number of colleagues and myself refer to in shorthand form as "critical religion."³⁰ The term "critical religion" can be unpacked as "the critical deconstruction of religion and related categories." The emphasis is on categories as discursive power configurations.

The operative binary relation here can be expressed as religion–non-religion, and it takes a number of rhetorical forms, such as the religion–politics binary. One typical rhetorical form of the modern discourse is that it is *either* religion *or* it is politics. For example, the Dalai Lama on his proposed visit to Taiwan to perform Buddhist rites was declared a *persona non grata* by the Beijing government, who referred to him as a political troublemaker hiding behind religion. China’s spin was that the Dalai Lama pretends to be only concerned with religion, which is harmless, but beneath appearances he is really involved in politics, and is therefore duplicitous and dangerous, a wolf in sheep’s clothing. In response the US declared him to be “a pure religious figure” and therefore not a troublemaker. Why would a “pure religious figure” not be a troublemaker? Because good religion obeys liberal values, does not seek power, and remains obediently outside politics. However, since it is impossible to satisfactorily define either religion or politics, what goes into which side of the binary depends on the rhetorical needs of the moment. This is its power – its appearance of authoritative and definite meaning and yet its infinite flexibility and ambiguity. On the one hand, public discourse and the determinations of constitutions and the courts assure us constantly both that there *ought to be* a separation between religion and government, and also that there really *is* such a separation. Yet we cannot find it. It’s a myth.

There is nothing “in the nature of things” to tell us what is and is not a religious as distinct from a secular practice or identity. Insofar as postcolonial theory represents itself as a secular critique of modern western representations, whether explicitly or implicitly, then it is engaged in the deployment of a colonial and neo-colonial classification. The secular and its imagined distinction from something called “religion” is at the mystified foundations of Anglo-American liberal capitalism, and thus of Anglo-American colonial and neo-colonial power formations.

DIFFERENT MEANINGS OF “LIBERAL”

Not only (as I have argued in this essay) is liberalism protected from the exposure it deserves by the rhetorical operation of the religion–secular binary. It is also protected by the ambiguous term “liberal,” which, having two quite different meanings, lends a benign façade. The older deployment of “liberal” as an adjective or adverb had the typical meaning of generous, flexible, and tolerant. As a characteristic this could in principle apply to any person in any culture at any point in history. But “a liberal” who believes in liberalism is someone who believes in possessive individualism, nation states, self-regulating markets, and the right to accumulate privately while externalizing the costs onto the remainder, regardless of what effect it has on the taxpayer, the poor, or the environment. In this sense liberalism is a deeply illiberal doctrine, but has benefitted from the Mr Nice Guy image, an image that has been internalized by generations of liberals themselves. The “Mr Nice Guy” is the masculinized “universal” subject of liberalism.

It also finally needs to be said that liberalism and its fictions have been conjured up mainly by men, and so has the modern world disorder.³¹ Just as men invented and ruled the Christian church-states and the Christian commonwealths, so it has been mostly men who invented secular reason, liberal capitalism, and the justifications for empire and colonization. It was Locke’s “man in the state of nature” that acted as a model for the “natural” rationality of the self-maximizer, and male private property

that was to be defended by male government. The story of women's emancipation still continues.³² In these days the façade of secular liberal politics and representative government looks more ragged than ever. To tighten the screw of postcolonial critique and puncture liberal self-regard, we need to question what seems so obvious.

ENDNOTES

1. My gratitude to both editors, David Kim and especially Jyotsna Singh, for their generous interdisciplinarity, their patience, and their helpful advice. Also see note citation to Robert Young's essay (n. 2), to which I am indebted for the title of this essay.
2. Robert J.C. Young, "Postcolonial Remains." *New Literary History* 43 (2012): 19–42.
3. The term "critical religion" has acted as a temporary marker demarcating a distinctive critical approach within more broadly "critical studies of religion." Following the logic of my argument here, it could as easily be "critical politics," or perhaps more accurately still "critical modern categories." I would not want a matter of nomenclature to obscure the substantive issues explored in this essay. For a number of indicative case studies, see the contributions to Timothy Fitzgerald, ed., *Religion and the Secular: Historical and Colonial Formations* (London: Equinox, 2007); and Trevor Stack, Naomi Goldenberg, and Timothy Fitzgerald, eds., *Religion as a Category of Government and Sovereignty* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). Also see the Critical Religion webpage at <http://criticalreligion.org>. See also my own monographs *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); and *Religion and Politics in International Relations: The Modern Myth* (London: Continuum, 2011).
4. See William D. Hart, *Edward Said and the Religious Effects of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). See also Jil Anidjar, "Secularism." *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Autumn 2006): 52–77 for an interesting discussion of the religion–secular distinction in Said's texts.
5. Aamir R. Mufti and his several contributors have set out to explore "Said's relationship to secularism, a relationship that is a critical one in a full and complex sense" in "Critical Secularism: A Reintroduction for Perilous Times." *Boundary 2*, an International Journal for Literature and Culture 31.2, *Critical Secularism* (Summer 2004): 1–9. However I think that neither Mufti, nor his contributors, nor Said himself, was able to take the critical project to its logical end, and continues to re-inscribe the binary reification of the "secular" and the "religious." A thoroughgoing critique would remove both these slippery and essentially empty terms from the rhetorical toolbox, and turn them into problematic objects of critique wherever they appear.
6. There are so many ongoing (and easily discovered) disputes about the dangers of mixing religion and politics in UK, France, USA, India, Turkey, and many other places and many of these have been explored in the various critical religion publications cited. At the moment in the UK there is a huge public row in the UK about Bishops, who have an unelected role in legislation, criticizing welfare reform by the government.
7. "Our Programme is based entirely on the scientific, and moreover the materialist, world-outlook. An explanation of our Programme, therefore, necessarily includes an explanation of the true historical and economic roots of the religious fog. . . . No number of pamphlets and no amount of preaching can enlighten the proletariat, if it is not enlightened by its own struggle against the dark forces of capitalism. Unity in this really revolutionary struggle of the oppressed class for the creation of a paradise on earth is more important to us than unity of proletarian opinion on paradise in heaven. . . . The revolutionary proletariat will succeed in making religion a really private affair, so far as the state is concerned. And in this political system, cleansed of medieval mildew, the proletariat will

- wage a broad and open struggle for the elimination of economic slavery, the true source of the religious humbugging of mankind.” V.I. Lenin, “Socialism and Religion.” 1905. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/dec/03.htm>.
8. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in the Preface to the Second Edition of their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London and New York: Verso, 2001/1985) say, “Our approach is grounded in privileging the moment of *political* articulation, and the central category of political analysis is, in our view, *hegemony*” (x; their italics). My point would be that a critical post-Marxist position would identify the very idea of “politics” and the “political” as a base category of the hegemonic discourse of liberal capitalism and uncritical socialism.
 9. Louis Althusser, “Ideological State Apparatuses.” In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127–186.
 10. Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
 11. I have explored these issues historically in my book *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also W.T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), for a scholarly account of the varying deployments of *religio* and other relevant terms in Roman and Medieval Latin, and the terms religion and religions.
 12. In his book *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962) the historian and philosopher C.B. Macpherson argued that the basic concepts of modern liberal market economy are already present in the seventeenth century, which helps to explain why John Locke is so frequently named as the father of liberalism. And at the heart of liberal political economy is the possessive individual whose rationality lies in the pursuit of self-interest, and who is by nature radically independent and “*owes nothing to society*” (63; my italics).
 13. However, it needs to be born in mind that both these analytically separate discourses are still alive and are tacitly confused in the minds of some agents, such as US Neocon evangelical politicians and missionaries.
 14. Secular socialists do much the same. Secular socialists believe their own secularity to be more advanced and progressive than the liberal version. To be effective, opposition to liberal capitalism needs to distance itself more thoroughly from the colonial remains of modern liberal mythology.
 15. Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of a Peasant Insurgency* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); Alpa Shah, “Religion and the Secular Left: Subaltern Studies, Birsa Munda and Maoists.” *Anthropology of This Century* 9 (2014). <http://aotcpress.com/articles/religion-secular-left-subaltern-studies-birsa-munda-maoists/>
 16. *Ibid.*: pages unnumbered.
 17. *Ibid.*
 18. *Ibid.*
 19. See a discussion of the alienating effects of the discourses on “religion” and “spirituality” and their supposed separation from “politics” in my book *Religion and Politics in International Relations*, 91. Also Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, eds., *Selling Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 2005).
 20. For example, in the quote above, Alpa Shah says “Guha did not go far enough in his critique of secular politics for the political significance of what the people he focuses on were doing”; Shah still chooses to refer to the people’s determination to transcend “secular politics” (and by implication its distinction from religion) as having “political significance.”
 21. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). Chakrabarty may have gone further than most postcolonial theorists in his close interrogation of the supposed universality

- of religion and secular politics, and hopefully my own essay here will contribute to that process by productively converging with his.
22. See T. Fitzgerald, "The Illusion of Politics." *E-International Relations*. <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/09/21/the-illusion-of-politics/>
 23. (There is a concentration of problematic categories. He uses terms derived from *religio* – "religion," "religions," "religious" – 18 times; "non-secular" 3 times; "secular" and "secularism" 19 times.)
 24. Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos, *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Thomas, S.M., *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Eli Berman, *Radical, Religious, and Violent: The New Economics of Terrorism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009). These authors are discussed in Fitzgerald, *Religion and Politics in International Relations*, 115–156 (Berman), 158–161 (Petito and Hatzopoulos), 177–205 (Thomas), 206–232 (Hurd).
 25. The notion that "religion" is not concerned with the world of power relations derives directly from John Locke's subversive challenge to the then existing orthodoxy of the Christian Commonwealth, in which there existed no domain of politics separated from another domain called religion. In effect he (and others such as William Penn) invented both in the same narrative.
 26. Tony Blair and Christopher Hitchens, *Is Religion a Force for Good in the World?* Toronto, December 25, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dds9XBhrYA>
 27. Micah Schwartzman, "What If Religion Isn't Special?" *Virginia School of Law: Social Science Research Network Electronic Paper Collection*, accessed on 20 August 2014. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1992090>
 28. In the past anthropologists have described such imagined constructs as animism, magic, or primitive pre-logical thought. Yet all this time they have been doing the same kind of thing themselves.
 29. My italics.
 30. See the Critical Religion webpage and blog at <http://criticalreligion.org>, edited by Dr. Michael Marten and Dr. Rajalakshmi Nadadur Kannan at the University of Stirling.
 31. I include Neoliberalism, which I take to be the contemporary fundamentalist revival movement of negative liberty. See my essay "Negative Liberty, Liberal Fictions and World Disorder." In *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty*, ed. Goldenberg, Stack, and Fitzgerald (Brill, 2015), 248–279.
 32. Martha E. Gimenez, "Capitalism and the Oppression of Women: Marx Revisited." *Science & Society* 69.1 (2005): 11–32.

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CHAPTER TEN

GODS IN A DEMOCRACY

State of nature, postcolonial politics, and Bengali *Mangalkabyas*



Milinda Banerjee

INTRODUCTION

This essay focuses on the contemporary reception of *mangalkabyas*, contextualized within a history dating to the late pre-colonial (fifteenth to mid-eighteenth) and colonial (mid-eighteenth to mid-twentieth) centuries of Bengali history.¹ *Mangalkabya* refers to a Bengali narrative genre dealing with tales of different goddesses and gods and the manner in which they supposedly helped human beings (and sometimes, animals) to gain social honor, political authority, wealth, and security. Composed in different parts of Bengal between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, and meant as much for oral recitation and singing (with large non-literate audiences) as for textual reading, most *mangalkabyas* were retold in the late pre-colonial centuries in several variations. While scholars have written on the genre in its pre-colonial context, little academic attention has been given to the manner in which *mangalkabyas* have been interpreted by Bengali middle classes as well as “subaltern” populations in our contemporary times. By addressing this research gap, I offer some broader theoretical arguments about the way in which a tradition of pre-colonial provenance has helped in decolonizing political thought and practice in modern Bengal.

The first part of the essay introduces some basic *mangalkabya* themes in their fifteenth to mid-eighteenth century contexts, suggesting that the genre promoted a subaltern-inflected pluralization of power and an audacious questioning of elite authority. The second part suggests that this “plebeian” orientation of the genre made it suspect in the eyes of Western-educated Bengali upper caste Hindu gentry (the so-called *bhadralok* elites) in the nineteenth and twentieth century, as their social and aesthetic tastes came to be molded by a Victorian education. But *mangalkabyas* were still shaped into symbols of Bengali poetic nationalism. The third part of the essay shows how, in the course of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, select Bengali authors deployed these legends to forge an intellectual trajectory of resistance to neocolonial global capital in that period. These legends have offered Bengalis a seductive vision of the postcolonial, imagined as the sylvan, the feminine, and the divine, a “state of nature” to which the citizen is urged to return from his or her (neo-) colonial economic, ecological, and linguistic exile. I also highlight the

internal contradictions within such Bengali visions, drawing in part on discussions about European social contract theories, and specifically the dissonances in conceptualizing the state of nature between Hobbes and Rousseau (the latter being directly invoked and critiqued by one of our authors). The fourth part offers two case studies where *mangalkabya* stories have proved crucial to “lower caste” groups in postcolonial West Bengal in imagining a just state where these communities enjoy economic security and political might. Through these examples I show how a pre-colonial literary-religious tradition has offered significant conceptual resources to leading Indian intellectuals (including postcolonial figures such as Mahasweta Devi, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Amitav Ghosh) to imagine a more just postcolonial society, while also enabling select peasant and artisan communities of Bengal to pursue practical programs of democratizing the body politic by articulating claims for power and status.

In the process, pre-colonial litterateurs like Mukunda (author of a celebrated late-sixteenth/early-seventeenth century version of *Chandimangal*) have been appropriated for constructing new visions of postcolonial and “subaltern” modernity. In sum, varied intellectual, political, and activist communities have interpreted, negotiated, and challenged the tensions of the “global” capitalist modern through claims of rights and justice deriving, in part, from local mythic narratives. I would suggest that this “transtemporal”² linkage between the *mangalkabyas* and modern politics stems, in part, from the fact that *mangalkabyas* were written in a global context of early modernity framed by intensifying transoceanic trade, monetization, urbanization, state formation, and related changes in the lives of peasant, pastoral, and forest-dependent communities. In today’s globalizing age, tropes from an earlier age of emergent globalization have proved malleable enough to be appropriated. Narratives of ecological conflict and social mobility drawn from the early modern period have thus been re-worked to conceptualize newer tensions of today’s world. Such a rearrangement of tradition has been facilitated by resilient community memories as well as by the proximity of many Bengali radical intellectuals, including Spivak and Ghosh, to the Subaltern Studies Collective (which gave birth to significant approaches to postcolonial studies). Local community memories, legends, and struggles have made their own proper contributions in reconstructing *mangalkabyas* for democratizing ends, while *mangalkabya* tropes have been popularized beyond Bengal by intellectuals with subalternist and postcolonial sympathies.

I argue that these legends of pre-colonial Bengal have thus offered many modern Bengalis creative ways of democratizing, and indeed decolonizing, their intellectual and political practices. If colonialism had accentuated pre-colonial forms of social hierarchy and increased the subalternization of many peasant and artisanal-mercantile communities in the region, then the tales of social mobility and radicalism enunciated in the *mangalkabyas* have offered tools of resistance and cultural insurrection. These deployments of the *mangalkabyas* further demonstrate that postcolonial political thought needs to take serious account of formats of religious belief present among subalternized social actors, such as among “lower caste” populations in India. Polycentric interpretations of divinity, as present among marginalized populations and as politicized in the course of claiming various rights, can instruct us about polycentric models of sovereignty, emerging from multiple sources, which may give adequate representation to “oppressed” peoples. This essay thus also responds to

the challenging question posed by Dipesh Chakrabarty as to whether non-European cultural traditions can offer meaningful conceptual resources to imagine democratization: “Which Indian or South Asian thinkers from the precolonial period, then, must we still wrestle with in fabricating or thinking about democratic forms of public life?”³ In charting various public deployments of *mangalkabya* narratives today, this essay adds texture and depth to the issues raised by Chakrabarty, while demonstrating how pre-colonial cultural and religious formations have been used to forge post-colonial forms of literary radicalism and democratic politics.

TALES OF CONTESTATION: MANGALKABYAS FROM THE FIFTEENTH TO THE MID-EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Earlier surveys as well as more recent interventions are unanimous in foregrounding the popular origin of the *mangalkabyas* with non-Brahmanical communities and women playing an important role in structuring the narratives of social-political rivalry enunciated in them.⁴ What I would add to these interpretations is a more generic argument, which would help contextualize the twentieth-century subaltern-inflected interpretations of the *mangalkabyas*. Between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, the *mangalkabyas* opened up new spaces of reflection on issues of power and authority: about the transition from forest/nature to state society; about the relation between state, market, and just price of goods; about the relationship between merchants and rulers; about the status of human women and female goddesses in society; about the relative position of upper caste and lower caste devotees and deities. Such questions were textualized and orally performed in a social climate of accelerated state formation in frontier societies in Bengal (and indeed across South Asia), the related gentrification of pastoral, peasant, and forest-dependent peoples, and the emergence of a transcontinentally-connected ocean-oriented commercialized and monetized economy. Plurality of social power in a commercializing frontier region provoked a complex and multi-vocal mode of questioning of authority, which forms, I argue, the most significant leitmotif in the *mangalkabya* traditions. The *mangalkabyas* offered reflections on the limits of power, be it of rulers, merchants, upper caste leaders, or husbands; they stressed the need to recognize the authority of those who occupied less normatively high status. They have rightly been considered as offering a new “political thought” for the age.⁵ In this argumentative attitude to the constitution of power and its limits we may locate one of the genealogies of the Bengali (early) modern, at least if we can understand (early) modernity as “historically a global and *conjunctural* phenomenon”⁶ rather than something of peculiarly (and lastingly) Western origination. The ruminations on the sources of, and restrictions on, legitimate power that we find in *mangalkabyas* bear a parallel with the preoccupations of much of early modern European political thought.

MANGALKABYAS AND BENGALI “MIDDLE-CLASS” IMAGINATION IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY

Mangalkabyas, however, came under attack at the height of the colonial era from leading Western-educated Bengali social reformers and intellectuals associated with

the so-called “Bengal Renaissance” of the nineteenth century. Thus Rammohun Roy (1772/4–1833), often called the father of modern India, condemned the idea that divinity could appear “in a shape so ridiculous as that piebald kite called Ksheman-kari”⁷ (a legend to be found in the *mangalkabya* genre of *Chandimangal*). He was disgusted by descriptions of the god Shiva’s sexual relationships with lower caste Koch women⁸ (found in the *mangalkabya* narratives of *Shibayan* and *Gosanimangal*). In contrast to such subaltern visions of divinity, the Bengali social-religious reformer advocated a kind of global god who would symbolize the unity of the Indian nation⁹ and, more importantly, of the world itself, founded on “rational” principles of constitutional rights and emerging capitalist-oriented property regimes secured by the British imperial order.¹⁰ Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), the famous Indian poet, philosopher, and first Asian Nobel Laureate, was similarly irritated by the low-status deities and devotees of the *mangalkabyas*. These stories represented to him the unwarranted social mobility opportunities opened up by supposed “Muslim despotism” and female resistance to “benevolent” male power. The poet’s monotheistic masculinist vision was shaped by the Brahmo religious movement, which had been founded by Rammohun Roy and was heavily influenced by reformist Christianity.¹¹ Elite Bengali puritanism was appalled by the eroticism in the *mangalkabya* tradition of *Kalikamangal*/*Bidyasundar*.¹² In case of *Dharmamangal*, scholars like Haraprasad Shastri (1853–1931) sought a classicist Buddhist past for the genre, obfuscating the lower caste origins of the deity Dharmaraj.¹³

This “elitization” of the literary canon in Bengal, and the growing ambivalence towards the pre-colonial *mangalkabya* traditions, was related to the manner in which British policies led to the coerced demilitarization and subjugation of armed peasant/pastoral/forest-dependent communities, and the impoverishment (consequent to colonial deindustrialization) of indigenous artisanal-mercantile communities. This provided the context for the formation of a Victorian Bengali *bhadralok* or gentry group, drawn from ritually high literate communities with economic bases in colonial rentier landholding structures and various modern professions. Their social force was bolstered by the British alliance with these groups and by the removal of alternate loci of power as was provided by martial-rural communities in earlier centuries. Behind the condemnation of popular “polytheism” there lay a sustained imperial attack on a pre-colonial-origin system of distribution of power among subaltern communities. Subaltern forms of polycentric and dispersed sacred authority and community autonomy came under assault from upper caste reformism, the latter being often articulated through colonially inspired monotheistic grammars (as in the case of Rammohun Roy).

However marginalized, *mangalkabyas* nevertheless remained difficult to neglect throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, given their historical importance to the emergence and development of Bengali literature. Hence, aestheticized appraisals of individual texts, often shorn of their broader popular contexts, have occupied a significant niche in Bengali literary nationalism. Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824–1873) thus invoked Mukunda (the most famous author of the *Chandimangal* tradition) as an archetype of the melancholic poet, an image which mirrored Dutt’s life of emotional crisis, physical exile, and poverty.¹⁴ The Anglicized Christian convert found in *Chandimangal* and *Annadamangal* motifs to represent his life of incessant travel and lost economic chances as well as a nostalgia to return to the womb of the

maternal-divine Bengali language.¹⁵ Later, drawing on imagery from Dutt (and ultimately from Mukunda), the poet Jibanananda Das (1899–1954) expressed his desire to return to Bengal as a *shankhachil* (kite) or *sonali chil* (golden kite).¹⁶ Jibanananda Das celebrated the heroines and heroes of *mangalkabyas*;¹⁷ in his poem “Banglar mukh ami dekhichhi” (I have seen the face of Bengal) he carved out a nostalgic *mangalkabya*-defined poetic nation.¹⁸ In these works, *mangalkabyas* incarnated a pre-industrial Bengali nature and served as signifiers of Bengali identity framed against a Western-dominated industrial-urban globality.

Some attempts to politicize the *Chandimangal* in an anti-colonial direction were also made in the 1890s and 1900s. The narrative of conflicts between subjects and rulers appealed to Indian nationalists; the presence of the goddess Chandi, for instance, turned into a symbol of the Indian nation-mother, helped in this appropriation.¹⁹ Thus in Atul Krishna Mitra’s (1857–1912) play *Ma (Mother)*, the hunter-king Kalketu of *Chandimangal* was projected as a nationalist ruler who united Hindus and Muslims to create a *dharमारajya* (righteous kingdom) by fending off oppressors. The reference to Muslims in Kalketu’s city invoked *Chandimangal*, while also resonating with Indian nationalist anxieties about the exclusion of Muslims from



Figure 10.1 *Kalketu the Hunter* (1938) by Abanindranath Tagore.
By kind permission of the Victoria Memorial Hall and
Rabindra Bharati Society, Kolkata.

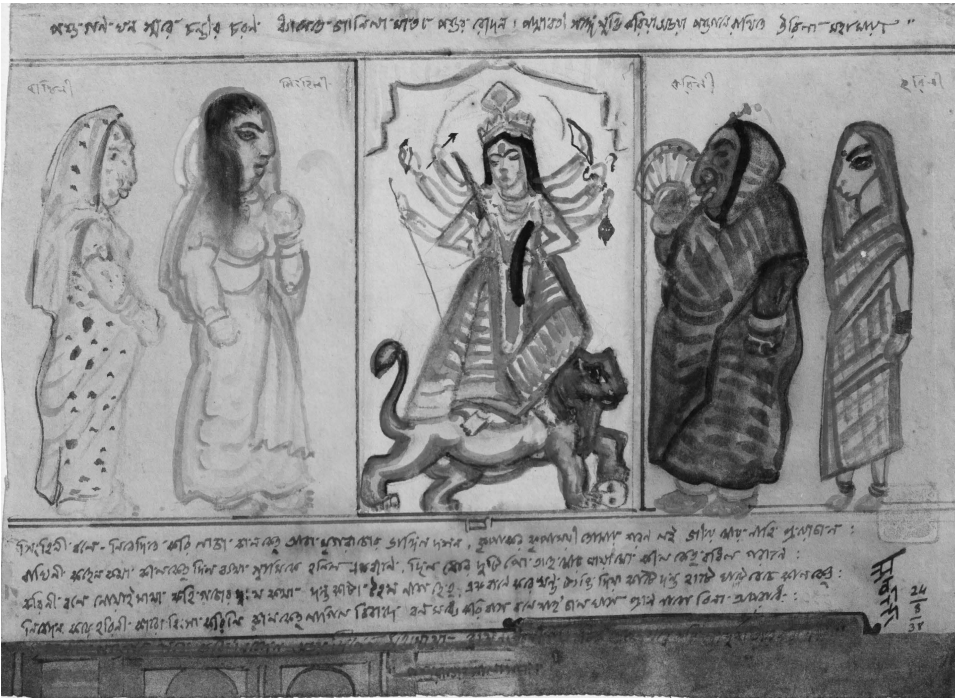


Figure 10.2 Wives of Tiger, Lion, Deer and Elephant Complaining to Durga (1938) by Abanindranath Tagore.

By kind permission of the Victoria Memorial Hall and Rabindra Bharati Society, Kolkata.

anti-colonial politics.²⁰ Later, Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay (1898–1971), arguably twentieth-century Bengal’s most famous novelist, in his novel *Ganadebata Panchagram* (1943–1944), referred to *Chandimangal* and *Manasamangal* to describe the lives and sorrows of lower caste villagers, while also heralding the way in which a future democratic nation – the *ganadebata* or people-god – would emerge, partly by utilizing older structures of community decision-making.²¹ It is notable that Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951), founder of the nationalist Bengal School of Art, painted Kalketu, his wife Phullara, the goddess Chandi, and animal characters from the *Chandimangal* in a series of 23 paintings created in 1938 (Figures 10.1 and 10.2).

These images demonstrated a subaltern inflection of nationalist art,²² symptomatic of a Bengali *bhadralok* attempt to establish solidarity with forest-dwelling tribal and animal populations at a time when mass politics was increasingly coming to the forefront across India. My larger argument here demonstrates that this Bengali nationalist engagement with the *mangalkabyas* embodied in a microcosm a broader trajectory within Indian nationalism to negotiate subaltern “Others” in the interwar years, including increasingly assertive lower caste and tribal communities.

Even as Bengali literature and art began to show a renewed appreciation for *mangalkabyas* in an epoch of mass politicization, scholarship in twentieth century Bengal

also gradually began to emphasize the local (peasant/“tribal”) origins of the deities described in the *mangalkabyas*. As a result, these investigations combined literary studies with ethnology, locating the genre in a Bengali regional tradition, which supposedly harmonized Sanskritic and pre/non-Brahmanical religious frameworks. While Bengali scholars offered some appreciation of the texts and cults, they also wrote condescendingly of the “decadence” in them, implying the libertarian sexual mores and the plebeian nature of the deities.²³ A literary counterpart of this ambivalent academic appraisal, for instance, is visible in Shambhu Mitra’s (1915–1997) play *Chand Baniker Pala* (1978), a retelling of the *Manasamangal*, the *mangalkabya* dedicated to the serpent-goddess Manasa. Mitra denounced Manasa and her female worshipper Sanaka as symbols of darkness, of the womb, of power-hunger, and of the absence of *yukti*/reason, as opposed to the “enlightened” male merchant Chand. For Mitra, Manasa heralded the fury of a pre-state (female) nature, which robbed the universe of (male) order.²⁴ As the reception of the *mangalkabyas* indicates, the demotic has remained a transgressive presence in the elite Bengali canon. And it is interesting to observe how the fractured and incomplete decolonization of Bengali political life has its aesthetic counterpart in the absent presence of *mangalkabyas* in Bengali middle-class imaginaries.

Entering the postcolonial era, and passing through a mixture of scholarly reappraisal and elitist marginalization, and even repudiation, the study of *mangalkabyas* has gradually become institutionalized as part of the Bengali curriculum in different universities in West Bengal. *Mangalkabyas* have been reified as symbols of Bengali nationhood among *bhadralok* audiences who generally care little about the relationship of the texts to “lower caste” life and politics. The fairly recent novel by Ramkumar Mukhopadhyay (b. 1956), *Dhanapatir Simhalyatra* (*The Journey of Dhanapati to Sri Lanka*, 2010), based on the *Chandimangal*, sees the *mangalkabyas* as valuable for their insights into old Bengali vocabularies.²⁵ And today the novel has shot into Indian literary limelight by winning the prestigious Ananda Purashkar (2013), sponsored by the most important Bengali publishing house in India, the ABP group, as well as the Kusumanjali Sahitya Samman award (2014). The “problem” of language loss, and thus the loss of Bengali/Indian national identity in an age of Western-dominated globalization, serves as an important contemporary context for the popularity of this adaptation of the *mangalkabya*. Not surprisingly then, a return to the *mangalkabyas* becomes a search for “authentic” roots for the author: “This is my return to village and home.”²⁶ There is, however, also a subtext whereby the Bengali can globalize by following the picaresque merchants of *Chandimangal* who had traveled to Sri Lanka in quest of wealth and adventure. This class-inflected reception of the *mangalkabyas* is thus structured by an elite (masculinist) model of postcoloniality, which seeks to bridge the archaic/rural-national evocations of community and the mercantile-global forces, endowing the postcolonial elite with a proud “indigenous” past (associated with the paternal pre-industrial village) as well as the skills to acquire capital and status in a de-territorialized world. The sea (the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean) offered in *mangalkabyas* a promise of unimaginable wealth, social mobility, as well as seductive danger, much as was the case in early modern Europe. Even today, for modern Bengali navigators of globalization, the ocean as a symbol of global movements remains a promise and a threat.

MANGALKABYAS AGAINST THREATENING CAPITAL: “POSTCOLONIAL” NARRATIVES

This section focuses on three celebrated Indian intellectuals who have used *mangalkabya*-related myths and deities to conceptualize the problems besetting forest-dependent human and nonhuman populations when confronted with global, and arguably neo-colonial, capital in contemporary Bengal (and India). They have drawn from *mangalkabyas* ideological resources for imagining new visions of nature, life, and a just society. I would argue that the *mangalkabyas* were written in an early modern Bengal, which was being comprehensively transformed by transoceanic trade, monetization, and ecological shifts. These processes bear crucial comparison with changes affecting the region today as it grapples with intensified forms of globalization. Hence specific modes of narrativizing social and ecological conflicts, which were articulated by the *mangalkabya* authors, have proved strategically attractive to modern litterateurs as the latter try to grapple with the dangers and promises of global capital today.

Mahasweta Devi's (b. 1926) novel *Byadhbhanda* (1994, translated into English in 2002 as *The Book of the Hunter*) is based on the Kalketu episode of *Chandimangal*; it has also been staged by a noted Bengali theater group.²⁷ The Magsasay Award-winning author has long been a celebrated voice championing the cause of “tribal” populations. In the introduction to the novel she argues that one can find in *Chandimangal* a history of the Shabar tribals, of their past glory, as much as of their present depressed state and loss of land and culture due to the invasion of the city-dwellers. At the center of her story are two couples: the Brahmin Mukunda (a fictionalized form of the historical character) and his wife, and the Shabar Kalya and Phuli. Even though Kalya and Phuli die at the end of the novel, Mahasweta Devi notes that the writer can give them immortality through literature and their political cause will thus never be forgotten. Chandi is invoked as the goddess “Aranyani” (the lady of the forest, a name derived from the Aranyani Sukta of the *Rgveda* [also spelt *Rigveda*], 10.146) who cares for the trees and animals in the forest and the Shabars who live there, who bestows lack of fear (*abhaya*) and is therefore known as Abhayachandi (an epithet for the goddess in *Chandimangal*).²⁸

The issue of displacement is central to the Kalketu story in *Chandimangal*, including in Mukunda's late-sixteenth/early-seventeenth century version, which has inspired Mahasweta Devi. The goddess initially seeks worship from animals. Later when Kalketu starts hunting them, the goddess intervenes, taking various animal forms and finally succeeds in persuading Kalketu to give up violence towards animals. In an exchange, however, she makes Kalketu the ruler of a city (*nagara*), which is constructed through the destruction of the forest (*vana*). The new state is characterized by settlement of peasants, artisans, and traders, and the growth of a market (*hat*, *bajar*). The forest/city, nature/state, *vana/nagara* polarities constitute the heart of this narrative. The tradition is markedly ambivalent, reflecting sympathy for the lost animals but also desire for the wealth of a new city. A pastoral elegy for the vanished wilderness coexists with affection for the new age of the city. In Mukunda's case there was a specific autobiographical and historical resonance for this sense of displacement: due to the oppressive conduct of officials, he had to leave his native village with his family and seek refuge on the southwestern frontier of Bengal.²⁹ Mahasweta Devi perhaps sees in Mukunda a fellow traveler: an intellectual who is able to show some

sympathy towards subalternized and exiled communities. Mukunda thus “becomes” Mahasweta Devi, as a reviewer has recently observed in an Italian literary magazine, foregrounding “[l]a sensibilità di Mukundaram come futuro autore del libro del cacciatore e quindi futura Mahasweta Devi” (the sensitivity of Mukundaram as the future author of the book of the hunter and therefore future Mahasweta Devi).³⁰

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (b. 1942) has also noted that one sees in *Chandimangal* an obsession with exchange and the establishment of (monetary) equivalence for all commodities: “Thus with the straining of the value-form in *Kabikankonchandi* we are on the way, however remotely, to globalization – which is the establishment of a uniform exchange system globally.”³¹ Spivak places herself in the role of Chandi as the savior of the forest-dwellers:

My allegiance, typically, is to the Aborigines (Sabar, their admittedly Sanskritized name, means precisely “hunter”) for whom I have been working as literacy teacher for the last ten years [. . .]. The viewer can perhaps cross identity a bit – go from U.S. POI to a gendered citizen of the world – and realize in herself the Devi of the hunters and gatherers, the Devi who wished to establish peace in the animal kingdom.³²

Spivak and Mahasweta Devi are interested in recovering a realm of the wilderness, displaying a Rousseau-like affection for nature and the natural man, in order ultimately to forge a “postcolonial” alliance between the *engagé/déclassé* intellectual and the plebeian. Yet the *vana*/forest in Indian political philosophies is as much beset with contradictions as the state of nature in Europe: it is the realm of spiritual purity, but also the domain of menacing demons and the expelled *nishada*/hunter (if we weave together, for example, the *Vedas*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Mahabharata*). In the pre-colonial *Chandimangal*, the animals in the forest kill each other. This incessant fear (*sashanka*) of being killed leads them to appeal to Chandi to form a government (of beasts), a transition from violent nature to state comparable to the celebrated social contract in Hobbes’ *Leviathan* that promises safety and protection in return for hierarchy and obedience. I would argue that Chandi acts in Mukunda’s *Chandimangal* as the creator or signifier of government, an immortal goddess who represents (in Hobbesian terms) the state as the “mortal god,” which promises to the people a lack of fear (in Mukunda, *niratanka*). To achieve this, Mukunda’s Chandi bestows on every animal its due sphere of action or social role (*je jar uchit hoy dila tare she vishay*).³³ However, this still leaves space for resistance to authority as when the animals complain against the lion-king and dispute his kingship. This interplay of conflict, violence, and benevolence is also visible in Kalketu, whose hunter identity demonstrates both his dependence on the forest as well as the threat he poses to it. Thus, while Mukunda and Mahasweta both emphasize the need to achieve lack of fear (*abhaya*), Mukunda sees in the forest a realm of agonism rather than primitive purity, unlike Mahasweta, who, from her nostalgic postcolonial location, desires to identify a harmonious balance of beast and man in the pre-modern/pre-colonial sylvan. The difference between Mukunda and Mahasweta with respect to visualizing the state of nature bears comparison with the analogous dissonance between Hobbes and Rousseau.

In Mukunda, the *vana* is constructed to rationalize the emergence of government (first among animals, and then in the city-state of Kalketu). Wealth (*dhana*) plays a polysemic role in structuring the forest: it is what allows the hunter to gentrify into a ruler, at least when the money is sanctified as a gift by the goddess, removing the ritual taint of the hunter “born into a very low family, by birth a Chuar, whom nobody touches.”³⁴ But money (in Mukunda, *tanka*, *taka*) is also what extinguishes the autonomy of the forest. In historical terms, the monetization of the Indian economy (including in the southwestern and southeastern coasts of Bengal where the *Chandimangal* was widely produced and circulated between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries) was greatly indebted to the introduction of transnational bullion, often American silver, but also from older sources such as the silver mines of Yunnan and the Shan states of Myanmar.³⁵ It was this silver (I argue), which bound into a connected globality the newly “discovered” Americas and the “early modern” Bengal frontier as landscapes where a state of nature could be imagined, one which would soon give way to the order of money, property, and state formation. The *Chandimangal* narrative was thus part of a connected global history of monetization, state formation, and ecological change that also produced early modern European discourses on the state of nature and social contract. Furthermore, the diachronic resemblances between early modern globality and late-twentieth/early-twenty-first century capitalist urbanity have facilitated the intertextual encounters between Mukunda, Mahasweta Devi, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. And within this context, activist intellectuals confronting neocolonial globality have articulated their anxieties through the writings of Mukunda, which were rooted in an older, early modern, world-historical transformation.

The *vana* or forest in these retellings of *Chandimangal* is thus not a (mere) bounded physical space that can be preserved in its purity, but (also) a political allegory and as such vulnerable to the threat of political-economic contracts which privilege some at the cost of others.³⁶ The *nagariya/pashu* or citizen/animal polarity of *Chandimangal* renders audible these differentiated levels of civic identity and its lack in the Bengali context. When deployed by Mahasweta Devi and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the *vana* imagery receives a further twist: it offers a precarious way of imagining a domain where the livelihood of forest-dependent (including hunter-gatherer) human communities and the requirement to preserve fauna and flora need to be balanced in a decolonizing democracy under the threat of neocolonial capital. A series of metamorphoses seals this vision: the goddess who takes the form of animals; the (female) intellectual who becomes the goddess and the poet; and the hunter who becomes the displaced prey.

In line with this focus on sylvan *mangalkabya* divinities, Amitav Ghosh’s famous English-language novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) about life in the Sunderbans, on the coast of the Bay of Bengal, references legends about Dakshin Ray (hero of another *mangalkabya* genre, *Raymangal*, but demonized in some other traditions which are cited by Ghosh). Ghosh quotes these myths to articulate the anxieties of littoral forest-dwellers in a land- (and sea-) scape menaced by life-threatening occupations as well as by the transgressive, but dangerous, allure of capitalist and urban globality.³⁷ For Ghosh the tiger-god Dakshin Ray represents the wild parts of the forest, which need to be balanced with human settlements (symbolized by Bonbibí, “Lady of the Forest,”

a figure originating at the interstices of local beliefs and popular Islam and believed to be a protector of forest-dependent human communities). In the pre-colonial-origin stories of the contestation and coming to terms between the two gods Dakshin Ray and Bonbibi, Ghosh locates a model of environmental preservation embedded in the normatively sanctioned control of human greed (to prevent over-exploitation of forest resources). Ghosh suggests that

the Bon Bibi legend uses the power of fiction to create and define a relationship between human beings and the natural world. Nowhere does a term equivalent to “Nature” figure in the legend of Bon Bibi, yet nowhere is its consciousness absent [. . .].³⁸

He argues that today’s conservation programs in India and elsewhere in Asia and Africa need to be informed by such normativized idioms of human-sylvan balance, taking local communities into partnership rather than viewing them as obstructions which need to be forcibly removed. The Dakshin Ray–Bonbibi structure of sharing authority between the animal and the human provides to him a model, which counters what he describes as exclusivist norms of forest conservation deriving from European-colonial ideologies. Ghosh incites us to expand our imaginary beyond frameworks like Rousseau’s:

Saint-Pierre, Rousseau and the Romantics of the 19th century have a justly honoured place in the history of environmentalism. To them goes the credit for creating an awareness of the fragility of the natural order in an age of machines. But to confront those very issues in the context of Asia and Africa today, requires not just a re-thinking of policy, but indeed re-imaginings of Nature: I use the plural advisedly, for it seems to me imperative that these imaginings be as varied as the natural world itself and we are fortunate here in possessing a great wealth of stories to point us in other directions.³⁹

Ghosh’s use of pre-colonial myths (related to the *Raymangal* tradition) – via his “re-imaginings of Nature” – further demonstrate how *mangalkabya*-related legends can offer ways of reflecting upon the problems involved in the entry of state power and translocal/transnational (arguably neocolonial) corporate capital in a semi-agrarian/sylvan frontier society. A *mangalkabya* trope, for instance, gained further currency when comparisons were made between the goddess Manasa and the politician Mamata Banerjee (b. 1955); she spearheaded an agitation to remove coercively inducted corporate-industrial investments from West Bengal, which would have been based on displacement of peasants from their lands. This twenty-first century conflict between Banerjee and the state-backed merchant groups, which finally led to the ouster of the Left Front government and Banerjee becoming the Chief Minister of West Bengal in 2011, was read in the light of the pre-colonial *Manasamangal* story of war between the wild serpent goddess and the arrogant merchant Chand Sadagar.⁴⁰ Thus *mangalkabya* myths have presented a treasury of concepts and allegories to fight against predatory capitalism in neocolonialism-inflected contexts. They offer a therapeutic vision of the state of nature and thereby prefigure, or perhaps only evasively promise the arrival of, an emancipatory postcolonial condition.

MANGALKABYAS AND NON-BRAHMANICAL POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY WEST BENGAL

Scholars have commented on the resilience of many *mangalkabya* deities and legends in popular piety, even when, as in the Dharmaraj cult, the *mangalkabya* is itself not orally recited or sung any more.⁴¹ This section examines the political significance of *mangalkabya*-embedded myths for two important non-Brahmin communities in West Bengal, the Modaks/Moiras (sweetmakers) and the peasant-origin Rajavamshis. For both Modaks and Rajavamshis, *mangalkabya*-related deities and legends have offered connections between late pre-colonial forms of non-Brahmanical community power and postcolonial forms of democratizing power among subalternized classes. The myths forge links between old-style collectivist assertion of authority and modern-Western idioms of rights-consciousness. In both instances I show how *mangalkabya* stories have bridged sacred traditions and modern democratic struggles.

My first case study pertains to the Modak/Moira (sweetmaker) community of West Bengal. Sweet-making has for centuries been a traditional industry in Bengal. Since the 1990s, however, the introduction of free trade “liberalization” policies in India has led to the increased advent of Western-origin “junk food” as alternatives to traditional sweets, the entry of big corporate capital in the sweets industry with which small traditional sweetmakers find it hard to compete, and a supposed rise in affinity for “Western” consumer tastes, altogether leading to an economic crisis among the Modaks.⁴² In this scenario, some relief has come through the government decision to create reservations in jobs and education for a category called the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), who are perceived as socio-economically disempowered. Modaks saw reservation as a way to offset the economic crisis since they were identified as an OBC group in West Bengal, and began to galvanize their community organization.⁴³

Two *mangalkabyas* have proved useful in creating a sacralized community identity and powerful affective discourses among the Modaks. The first is *Krishnamangal*. In Bengal, between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, translocal commercialization fostered the development of important crafts and industries, and production of milk-based sweets was one of them. Vaishnava piety, based on the pastoral god Vishnu-Krishna, emphasized the use of milk products in worship.⁴⁴ Today’s Modak community literature underscores the sacred and economic importance of Vaishnavism to Modak success. In this context the seventeenth century *Krishnamangal* of Dvija Parashuram, a Vaishnava *mangalkabya*, is cited.⁴⁵

But the *kuladebata* or community god of the Modaks is not Krishna but Ganesha,⁴⁶ whose birth is recounted in *Chandimangal*. Mukunda’s *Chandimangal* further describes the Modaks settled in Kalketu’s city. Like other artisanal groups, they are welcomed by Kalketu and given privileged land grants and rent-free housing. Subsequently, “the main Modak merchants set up sugar manufactories, producing pieces of sweets; they go from one city to another, carrying their merchandise on their heads, supplying them to children.”⁴⁷ There is an almost social contract ethos through which the settlement of different social groups in Kalketu’s city in *Chandimangal* occurs through arrangements between the ruler and community members and leaders who are given various incentives and privileges in the new polity.⁴⁸ And interestingly, this story of the settlement of Modaks in the pre-colonial *Chandimangal* city is cited even

today by Modak caste tracts, thus, providing an attractive historical genealogy for community members.⁴⁹

A certain sacralized understanding of the political-economic order which was created in the *mangalkabyas* (the *nagara* or city-state being built through divine grace and incorporating different artisanal-mercantile communities) has thus proven a handy signifier for post-globalization Modaks to press forward their rights claims. These claims operate in conjunction with more “secular” idioms, which emphasize economic and social deprivation. In a neoliberalism-inflected economy, many Modaks are becoming proletarianized and converted into artisans working for prosperous businessmen from other social groups.⁵⁰ Despite these challenges, hybridized rights-claims drawing on pre-colonial traditions of community autonomy (when Modaks were producers and merchants rather than mere wage-laborers for others) as well as modern-secular grammars offer a tentative route for Modaks to organize their community, galvanize self-help schemes, and take advantage of government reservations and schemes.

My second case study relates to the Rajavamshis, the largest Scheduled Caste group in West Bengal.⁵¹ A community of peasant origin, predominantly found in sub-Himalayan northern Bengal, the Rajavamshis today are engaged in different occupations.⁵² Rajavamshis emerged into modern politics in the early twentieth century.⁵³ Two major trends in Rajavamshi politics are at present visible: one demands a nation-state for the people of the region, and has resorted to militancy to further this objective, and the other ostensibly remains within constitutional paradigms, and demands a separate state within India but outside the state of West Bengal. Rajavamshi grievances relate to the social, political, and economic dominance of upper caste *bhadralok* gentry in northern Bengal, which dates to the colonial period and intensified after 1947 as Bengali Hindus fled from eastern Pakistan into West Bengal.

In Rajavamshi politics today, the gods Shiva and Chandi are central icons. The Kamakhya temple and the Gosanimari temple, both dedicated to the Goddess, and the Jalpesh temple of Shiva have been important sites of Rajavamshi mobilization. Meetings of the Kamtapur–Greater Cooch Behar movements of the Rajavamshis often begin with the worship of Shiva and Chandi. The most important Rajavamshi political ritual today, the annual celebration of the sixteenth century Koch prince Chilarai’s birthday, is accompanied by the worship of these two gods. Students are encouraged to greet their teachers with the victory acclamation of “Jay Shiva Chandi.” The militant Kamtapur Liberation Organization invokes the goddess Chandi in her form as Kamteshvari, the Lady of Kamta, or Kamta Ma, Mother Kamta. There are attempts to justify the creation of a separate state by arguing for the autonomy of a Kamtapuri language (distinct from Bengali), described as the goddess’s own language.⁵⁴

The centrality of Chandi/Kamteshvari and Shiva in Rajavamshi politics is not accidental or purely based in local ritual; rather, it can be explained through a study of the *mangalkabyas*. In the *Shibayan* (earliest version dates to the seventeenth century), a *mangalkabya* centering on the god Shiva, the latter “entered into the *nagara* (city/city-state) of the Koches” and engaged in sexual delights with Koch women. The sage Narada reported to Chandi that Shiva had been sent “to grow crops” but “had gone mad and fallen under the sway of Koch women.”⁵⁵ We get a clue here about the intertwining of urbanization, state-building, and formation of peasant groups in the Koch kingdom carried out through the auspices of the Shiva cult since the sixteenth

century. The story is mentioned in *Gaurimangal* too.⁵⁶ The *Gosanimangal* tradition from the Koch kingdom, a local *mangalkabya* of which we get only one written version (from 1823–1824), describes how the Koch dynasty originated from Shiva, thereby ensuring that “the people were always happy; there was no violence in the villages, nor poverty and other sorrows.”⁵⁷ While the Koch royal dynasty was traced to Shiva in Koch dynastic chronicles, Koch community members in general, many of whom began to assume the Rajavamshi (“belonging to the royal lineage”) identity to assert their political prowess, also came to be referred to as Shivavamshis, “belonging to Shiva’s lineage.”⁵⁸

In the *Gosanimangal*, the goddess in her form as Gosani or Kamteshvari blessed a cowherd boy to become the ruler of a city called Kamtapur (which flourished in fact between the late-thirteenth and late-fifteenth centuries).⁵⁹ For today’s Rajavamshi politicians, the archaeological remains of this kingdom, Gosanimari, constitute an important site of community identity.⁶⁰ The demand for a modern Kamtapur state is genealogically related today to the identity and glory of the old Kamata kingdom. Here it is apparent how the Rajavamshi community politics of achieving autonomy from upper caste Bengali domination is thus rooted in the cults of Shiva and Chandi/Kamteshvari. This interlacing between community and deity can be traced to pre-colonial narratives embodied in the *mangalkabyas*. While *mangalkabyas* had once normativized the social mobility of select peasant, artisan, and forest-dependent groups in early modern Bengal, many of these myths continue to be deployed in contemporary Bengal by descendants of these groups even today. It is quite striking how traditions, which were once popularized by the *mangalkabyas*, have proved resilient in inciting “subaltern” politics in contemporary West Bengal. Not surprisingly *mangalkabya* myths and deities have continued to generate political values, sometimes through direct quotations of the texts and sometimes through a general remembrance of the myths even when the texts have partly receded into the background.

CONCLUSIONS

This essay has followed a “transtemporal” methodology in showing how pre-colonial Bengali *mangalkabya* myths have been reconstructed in contemporary times by subaltern “lower caste” actors as well as celebrated Bengali authors to grapple with questions of capitalism, neocolonial political economies, state power, and the rights of disadvantaged social groups. I have argued that contemporary late-twentieth/early-twenty-first century debates about economic and ecological transformations have been framed through pre-colonial sacralized myths, at least in part because there are similarities between historical changes induced by early modern globality and by the globalization of our own times. The comparative possibilities of contexts have facilitated imaginative quotations of early modern Bengali traditions by today’s Bengali actors, even if such citations have been filtered through colonial and neocolonial mediations. In this process, contemporary intellectual appropriations of *mangalkabyas* have had to grapple with the colonially induced marginalization of these traditions and subalternization of the social groups described in them.

To understand their development, one has only to look to the period between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, which witnessed globally connected changes with significant intellectual repercussions that continue to resonate today. Furthermore,

the growth of long-distance trade, monetization, intensified urbanization, and expansion of agrarian frontiers created social transformations in different parts of the world, which need to be compared within a unified field of analysis rather than through segmented “area studies” approaches. The image of Bengal as a magical horizon of opportunity and adventure in the early modern European imagination⁶¹ can be meaningfully related to the contribution of Europeans to city-formation (*nagara-pattan*) in early modern Bengal.⁶² The circulation of transoceanic bullion facilitated urbanization in Bengal as well as in Europe, even as it also produced yearning for the *vana*/forest in Bengal and a quest for the state of nature among Europeans. The crisis faced by forest-dwellers in Bengal bears some resemblances with that faced by Native American communities in the New World and stimulated new kinds of reflection on those who lived “in nature.” The gentrification of frontier peoples and the expansion of commercial artisanal-mercantile groups opened opportunities for social mobility, producing new debates about the relationship between rulers and ruled, elites and subalterns, across continental borders. Thus, from this transborder perspective, ideas of *vana* and subaltern power narrated in the *mangalkabyas* not only intervened in the various historical configurations relating to Bengal, but also, significantly, form part of a global history that has produced discourses on nature and social contract in early modern Europe. Given what I have argued about the globally embedded origins of the *mangalkabyas*, it is perhaps not very surprising that some Bengalis today draw on *mangalkabya* narratives and radicalize them to construct “postcolonial” responses to globalization.

I have taken cues from Mahasweta Devi, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Amitav Ghosh in stressing how *mangalkabya* myths can be used to debate ideas of democratic social and environmental space-making. I have shown how Modak community tracts and Rajavamshi political formations associated with the Kamtapur and Greater Cooch Behar movements have used early modern Bengali narratives of social mobility to energize their communities in the quest for greater rights and power, thereby powerfully transforming the imagination of history and contemporaneity in the Bengali social space. Gautam Das, who has invoked *mangalkabyas* to create a community identity for Modaks, suggests the broader purpose of such myths and genealogies: to enhance the sense of community (*svajati*), whereby people can fight for their lives, property, and honor (*atmamaryada*), and through sustained agitation, win their claims (*dabi*) from the state.⁶³

Today, *mangalkabya*-inspired publics include transnational audiences as well as small-town and rural Bengalis who demand a more just and welfare-oriented government consonant with a postcolonial epoch. In spite of the decentering of *mangalkabyas* in the elite Bengali cultural canon since the high colonial era, the re-articulations of *mangalkabya* myths have created specific bridges between pre-colonial forms of communitarian and demotic power and postcolonial forms of democratic aspiration and memory. Ultimately *mangalkabyas* help us to think about the relation between pluralistic pantheons and democratic sovereignty. The “persistence of polytheism”⁶⁴ needs to be accounted for not only in socio-religious terms, but also in terms of their implications for postcolonial democratic practice. The Bengali poet Nirendranath Chakravarti has recently compared the goddesses and gods in *mangalkabyas* who sought human favor to politicians who seek votes.⁶⁵ This fascinating equation allows us to relate the multiplicity of divinities and devotees in certain cosmologies with the

plurality of the electorate and political groups in a democracy. And as I have shown, while the multiplicity of divine cults and their subaltern inflection in pre-colonial Bengal were deeply embedded in popular social aspirations, this populist tenor has also made these *mangalkabya* gods available for democratic political usage in modern times. Of course, there is no guarantee that “polytheism” necessarily leads to a liberal-radical political system. However I would argue that when disenfranchised groups deploy their multiple conceptions of divinity to articulate their claims to power against established elites, then this form of polytheism may help forge a more pluralistic democracy and contribute towards the poesis of a decolonized world.

ENDNOTES

1. For the period after 1947, I have focused on the Indian state of West Bengal while discussing reception issues. A study on eastern Bengal, later Bangladesh, requires a separate essay.
2. On the transtemporal, see David Armitage, “What’s the Big Idea?” *The Times Literary Supplement*, September 20, 2012. <http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/public/article1129685.ece>
3. Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Muddle of Modernity.” *The American Historical Review* 116 (2011): 674.
4. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Bangla Mangalkabyer Itihas* (Calcutta: A. Mukherjee and Co., 2009 [1939]); Sudipta Kaviraj, “The Two Histories of Literary Culture in Bengal.” In *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 516–518, 528–529; David L. Curley, *Poetry and History: Bengali Mangal-kavya and Social Change in Precolonial Bengal* (Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2008); Kumkum Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India: Persianization and Mughal Culture in Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009); David L. Curley, “The ‘World of the Text’ and Political Thought in Bengali Mangal-kavya, c. 1500–1750.” *The Medieval History Journal* 14 (2011): 183–211; Kumkum Chatterjee, “Goddess Encounters: Mughals, Monsters and the Goddess in Bengal.” *Modern Asian Studies* 47 (2013): 1435–1487.
5. Curley, “The ‘World of the Text’.”
6. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Hearing Voices: Vignettes of Early Modernity in South Asia, 1400–1750.” *Daedalus* 127 (1998): 99.
7. Rammohun Roy, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy* (Allahabad: The Panini Office, 1906), 117.
8. Rammohun Roy, *Rammohan Rachanabali* (Calcutta: Haraf, 1973), 160.
9. Roy, *English*, 232–233; Roy, *Rammohan*, 462.
10. Milinda Banerjee, “Doubt, Authority and the Individual. Rammohun Roy, Christian Missionary Discourses and Political Theology in Early Nineteenth-Century Bengal.” In *Individualisierung durch christliche Mission?*, ed. Martin Fuchs, Antje Linkenbach-Fuchs, and Wolfgang Reinhard (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015), 438–456.
11. Relevant passages are compiled in Bhattacharyya, *Bangla*, 103–127; see also Rabindranath Tagore, “Svargiya Prahasan.” In *Rabindrarachanabali*, ed. Rabindranath Tagore (Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, 1984), 532–537.
12. Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1989).
13. Frank J. Korom, “‘Editing Dharmaraj’: Academic Genealogies of a Bengali Folk Deity.” *Western Folklore* 56 (1997): 51–77.
14. Michael Madhusudan Dutt, *Madhusudan Rachanabali* (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 1974), 159.
15. *Ibid.*, 159–160, 167, 180.

16. Jibanananda Das, *Shreshtha Kabita* (Calcutta: New Script, 2006), 49, 61–62.
17. *Ibid.*, 48, 50.
18. Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Romantic Archives: Literature and the Politics of Identity in Bengal.” *Critical Enquiry* 30 (2004): 654–682.
19. E.g. Dineshchandra Sen, *Phullara* (Calcutta: Bipinbihari Chattopadhyay, 1906).
20. Atul Krishna Mitra, *Ma* (Calcutta: Nimaicharan Basu, 1895).
21. Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, *Ganadebata Panchagram* (Calcutta: Bengal Publishers, 1986), especially 455–456.
22. Debashish Banerji, *The Alternate Nation of Abanindranath Tagore* (Delhi: Sage, 2010), 72–84.
23. For a critical appraisal, see Korom, “‘Editing Dharmaraj’”; for examples of this ambivalent subalternizing turn, see Bhattacharyya, *Bangla*; Sukumar Sen, *Madhyayuger Bangla o Bangali* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati Granthanbibhag, 1996 [1945]); Sukumar Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*, vols. 1–2 (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 2013 [1940, 1991]); Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta*, vols. 2–3 (Calcutta: Modern Book Agency, 2006–2009 [1962–1966]).
24. Shambhu Mitra, *Chand Baniker Pala* (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar and Sons, 2007).
25. Ramkumar Mukhopadhyay, *Dhanapatir Simhalyatra* (Calcutta: Mitra o Ghosh, 2010); Ramkumar Mukhopadhyay (interview), “Dhanapatir Singhaljatra Wins Ananda Award.” Published April 15, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cb1W2xPE8X4>; Ramkumar Mukhopadhyay (interview), “Ananda Award Given.” Published April 28, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v60oHKSAsas>
26. Gautam Chakravarti, “Harano Shabder Mayay Mugdha Ananda-Sandhya.” *Anandabazar Patrika*, April 28, 2013; also Karan Choudhary, “On Wings of Words.” *The Hindu*, August 17, 2014.
27. *The Telegraph*, “Phullaketur Pala.” October 30, 2003, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1031030/asp/calcutta/story_2509806.asp; Roma Chatterji, “Orality, Inscription and the Creation of a New Lore.” *Cultural Analysis* 6 (2007): 71–90.
28. Mahasweta Devi, *Byadhbhanda* (Calcutta: Dey’s Publishing, 1994); Mahasweta Devi, *The Book of the Hunter*. Trans. Sagaree Sengupta and Mandira Sengupta (Calcutta: Seagull, 2002).
29. Mukunda, *Chandimangal*. Ed. Khudiram Das (Calcutta: Dey’s Publishing, 2007).
30. Francesco Gusella, “Racconti Tribali e Belle Lettere, Il Caso di ‘The Book of the Hunter’ di Mahasweta Devi.” *Shackleton: La Rivista dell’Orso Bianco*, October 29, 2013, <http://rivistashackleton.wordpress.com/2013/10/29/racconti-tribali-e-belle-lettere-il-caso-di-the-book-of-the-hunter-di-mahasweta-devi/>
31. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Moving Devi.” *Cultural Critique* 47 (2001): 150. Mukunda was given the title Kabikankan (kabi = poet, kankan = bracelet or ornament) probably by a local ruler; hence his *Chandimangal* is often called *Kabikankanchandi*. See Khudiram Das’s comments in Mukunda, *Chandimangal*, 53.
32. Spivak, “Moving Devi,” 151.
33. Mukunda, *Chandimangal*, 105–106.
34. *Ibid.*, 178.
35. For Kalketu as a marker of monetization, see Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 206, 254; Curley, *Poetry and History*, 36–74; for some recent discussions on monetization in Bengal, Rila Mukherjee, “Introduction: Bengal and the Northern Bay of Bengal.” In *Pelagic Passageways: The Northern Bay of Bengal before Colonialism*, ed. Rila Mukherjee (Delhi: Primus Books, 2011), 1–260; John Deyell, “Monetary and Financial Webs: The Regional and International Influence of Pre-Modern Bengali Coinage.” In *Pelagic Passageways: The Northern Bay of Bengal before Colonialism*, ed. Rila Mukherjee (Delhi: Primus Books, 2011), 279–314.

36. European social contract theories have thus been critiqued: e.g. C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); Carole Pateman and Charles Mills, *Contract and Domination* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).
37. Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2004), 101–106, 354–360.
38. Amitav Ghosh, “Wild Fictions.” *Outlook Magazine*, December 22, 2008. <http://www.outlookindia.com/article/Wild-Fictions/239276>
39. Ibid.
40. Sujoy Dhar, “Day of the Minorities.” *Newsline*, June 27, 2011. <http://www.newslinemagazine.com/2011/06/day-of-the-minorities/>; Sujoy Dhar, “Mamata Banerjee: The Snake Goddess Arrives.” *India Blooms*, 2011, accessed August 30, 2014. <http://www.indiablooms.com/AssemblyelectionDetailsPage/assemblyelectionDetails130511t.php>
41. Frank J. Korom, “Oral Exegesis: Local Interpretations of a Bengali Folk Deity.” *Western Folklore* 56 (1997): 157–173; Frank J. Korom, “The Bengali Dharmaraj in Text and Context: Some Parallels.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32 (2004): 843–870.
42. Sonali Chakravarti Banerjee and Monalisa Basu, *Politics of Categories, Economies of Deprivation: Artisanal ‘Backward Classes’ in Contemporary West Bengal* (Calcutta: Department of Political Science, University of Calcutta, 2013), 30–31.
43. Narayan Chandra Modak, “Karyakari Sampadaker Kalam Theke.” In *Samhati*, September, ed. Ratan Kumar Modak (Nabadvip: Nikhil Bangiya Modak Samiti (Nabadvip Shakha), 1996) no pagination. I thank Anasua Datta, Associate Professor, Jhargram Raj College, for generously sharing with me her collection of Modak caste literature.
44. Sanatkumar Mitra, ed., *Lokasamskriti Gabeshana* 12, Special Number “Bangali Mishtanna o Samskriti,” 1999.
45. Gautam Das, *Nabadvipe Anushtitha Nikhil Bangiya Modak Samiti (Nabadvip Shakha)-r Tiritiya Barsha Pratishtha Dibas Udjapan Upalakshye Bishesh Atithi Shri Gautam Das (Advocate) Pratibedan* (Krishnanagar: Fine Art Press, 1997); Maniklal Sinha, “Modak Sampraday: Aitihya o Adhikar.” In *Souvenir of Bankura Modak Samaj*, ed. Kanailal Nag, (2000), no pagination.
46. Das, *Nabadvipe*; Nikhil Bangiya Modak Samiti, *Anushtthan Suchi*, August 26, 1998; Sinha, “Modak”; Bijaykrishna De, “Modakjati Itikatha.” In *Souvenir of Bankura Modak Samaj*, ed. Kanailal Nag (2000), no pagination; Kanailal Nag, “Sampadaker Katha.” In *Souvenir of Bankura Modak Samaj*, ed. Kanailal Nag (2000), no pagination; *Samaj Bartika*, July 1998 and July 2003, no pagination; Banerjee and Basu, *Politics of Categories*, 29.
47. Mukunda, *Chandimangal*, 213–214.
48. Milinda Banerjee, “State of Nature, Civilized Society, and Social Contract: Perspectives from Early Modern Bengal on the Origin and Limits of Government.” *Calcutta Historical Journal* 28 (2008): 1–55.
49. Das, *Nabadvipe*; Sinha, “Modak.”
50. Banerjee and Basu, *Politics of Categories*, 31.
51. “Scheduled Caste” refers to a constitutional category in India, denoting communities who are perceived as being severely socially and economically disempowered due to caste stratification, and therefore in need of state aid, for example through reservations in political representation, education, and jobs.
52. Census of India 2001, “West Bengal. Data Highlights: The Scheduled Castes.” Accessed August 30, 2014. http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_sc-westbengal.pdf
53. Swaraj Basu, *Dynamics of a Caste Movement: The Rajbansis of North Bengal, 1910–1947* (Delhi: Manohar, 2003).
54. Archives of Intelligence Branch, Criminal Investigation Department, West Bengal Police, Section: Communal, Records on Greater Cooch Behar People’s Association and Greater

- Cooch Behar Democratic Party (GCPA/GCDP), Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO), and All India Kamtapur Students Union (AKSU); Rajat Subhra Mukhopadhyay, *Uttarkhand Movement: A Sociological Analysis* (Darjeeling Dist.: University of North Bengal, 1987), 22–23.
55. Rameshvar, *Shib-sankirtan ba Shibayan*, ed. Jogilal Haldar (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 2012; this version of *Shibayan* dates to the early-mid eighteenth century), 95–97, 243.
56. Raja Prithvichandra of Pakur, *Gauri-Mangala*, ed. Bimanbehari Majumdar (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1971), 2–3.
57. Radhakrishna Das, *Gosani Mangal*, ed. Harishchandra Paul (Koch Bihar: Chandrashekar Paul, 1977), 110.
58. H.H. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1998 [1891]), 492.
59. Das, *Gosani Mangal*.
60. AKSU Records.
61. Jorge Flores, “Distant Wonders: The Strange and the Marvelous between Mughal India and Habsburg Iberia in the Early Seventeenth Century.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49 (2007): 553–581.
62. Accompanied by artillery-men, the *pherangis* (Franks) thus built luxurious houses in the divine city of Kalketu in Dvija Ramdeb’s mid-seventeenth century *Chandimangal* from Chittagong in the southeastern Bengal frontier: Dvija Ramdeb, *Abhayamangal*, ed. Ashutosh Das (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1957), 79.
63. Das, *Nabadvipe*.
64. Page DuBois, *A Million and One Gods: The Persistence of Polytheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).
65. Chakravarti, “Harano Shabder Mayay.”

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

IMAGINING THE “MUSLIM” WOMAN

Religious movements and constructions of gender in the sub-continent



Meryem Zaman

INTRODUCTION

Increasing numbers of urban middle- and upper-class Pakistani women are veiling and participating in piety movements,¹ which have gained large followings in urban Pakistan and have set up faith-based institutions, schools, and private classes.² Young college students are demonstrating growing religious sentiment and affiliation with ideas of Pakistan as an Islamic state,³ and TV shows and newspapers are conducting a vibrant public discourse regarding gender and Islamic piety. While all of these factors mimic changes in other Muslim countries with resurgent Islamic movements, I argue that Pakistan's postcolonial history impacts Pakistani revivalist movements' utilization of well-known and widely accepted tropes of cultural corruption popularized by independence movements in pre-partition India, leading them to claim to be the bearers of an explicitly Pakistani culture as well as a “pure” Islam. A number of scholars have pointed to the growing tension between revivalist/“fundamentalist” women, and their non-revivalist counterparts in Pakistan.⁴ These tensions center around questions of religious and cultural authenticity,⁵ and can be seen operating in the public discourse surrounding the question of women and religion. Popular newspaper articles and TV shows challenge the legitimacy of revivalist modes of religious expression, asking whether revivalist reforms themselves are not “more cultural than religious or scriptural.”⁶ These new debates around the well-worn issues of tradition and modernity offer telling insights into the constantly evolving roles and identities of women along the religious and cultural fault-lines of the modern Pakistani state.

Islamic movements are simultaneously a response to and a condition of the postcolonial moment.⁷ Peter van der Veer has argued that “the history of the colonial state is crucial for the anthropological understanding of postcolonial religious formations in South Asia.”⁸ Colonial history colors the present, impacting Islamic movements' visions of virtuous women in contemporary Pakistan. Colonial “central moral positioning(s) of women”⁹ as loci of social change and imaginings of women's “position as moral teacher(s) and example(s)”¹⁰ result in both an intensified Islamic revivalist outreach to women, as well as urban Pakistani reactions to women who, through sartorial and social changes, mark themselves as agents of Islamic reform.

During the colonial era, nationalist reformers painted behaviors that did not fit within the bounds of their imagined nation-state as symptomatic of cultural corruption not only by colonial rulers but also by the religious communities who lived side-by-side with Muslims in British India. Contemporary Pakistani revivalists draw on this history, as well as ideas of conflict with “the West” that are common across national manifestations of the Islamic revival, to paint all non-revivalist modes of being as unauthentic and non-Pakistani.

Pakistani revivalists’ identity-formation maneuvers reject all alternative Pakistani identity-positions, leading to tensions between revivalists and their Pakistani Others; the discourse surrounding Pakistani revivalism is shaped as much by colonial history as by the religious claims of the transnational Islamic revival. Revivalist constructions of a purified Pakistani culture are particularly contentious because “postcolonial questions about religion and politics are tied up with colonial history,”¹¹ and revivalist projections of this history into contemporary discourses cast their opponents as collaborators with colonizing forces. The impact of revivalist claims of cultural purity is conditioned by their history; pre-partition, accusations of cultural impurity were essential to the construction of a nationalist “Pakistani” identity, and the echoes of those colonial encounters give them weight. An examination of the “domains of difference”¹² delineated by revivalists illustrates the ways in which Pakistani subjects are formed through antagonistic and competing claims to Islam, gender, and ideas of the nation.

I draw on the narratives of revivalist women belonging to contemporary religious movements in Pakistan, including the *Al-Huda Welfare Trust*, the *Jama’at Islami*, and the *Tablighi Jama’at*,¹³ to examine the ways in which women construct identities as decolonized subjects, de-legitimizing all other forms of Pakistani womanhood as foreign-influenced. I take Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of social antagonism as a starting point for understanding why women’s performance of revivalist identities in Pakistan are tied to questions of authentic cultural and religious expression. Laclau and Mouffe propose an ontological understanding of the social as “a discursive space,”¹⁴ and argue that each agent’s identity is a combination of multiple subject-positions represented through discourse and performance, some of which might be opposed to each other. Social agents identify with a number of given positions, and the demands of each identification are negotiated according to context and power relations.¹⁵ In this schema, identities become hegemonic through the utilization of “logics of equivalence,”¹⁶ which dissolve the differences between groups by “relating them to a common project and by establishing a frontier to define the forces to be opposed, the ‘enemy’.”¹⁷ These logics reduce the difference between individuals who contain within themselves multiple particularities, establishing them as representations of a universality that transcends the particular.¹⁸

I argue that agents who present themselves as bearers of an “Islamic” identity within Pakistan engage in logics of equivalence that collapse distinctions between various forms of revivalism and construct themselves as the only legitimate bearers of both Islamic and Pakistani identity.¹⁹ This attempt is seen by other urban Pakistanis as part of a hostile engagement, and leads to numerous discursive and symbolic conflicts. This is particularly the case because revivalists draw on the sartorial expression and socialization habits of women in order to create images of a purified national identity, referencing established colonial tropes regarding both the centrality

of women to social reform as well as the need to “rescue” women from “impure” religious and cultural influences.

Homi Bhabha has argued that it is at the point of signification “through which statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity.”²⁰ In the Pakistani context, women become points of signification, and their sartorial expression and religious practices serve to demonstrate not only their own, but also their families positioning along a socio-political scale. Urban revivalist women are called on to bear a much greater role in the articulation of cultural difference than revivalist men, and the spaces where they enact differentiation and invoke cultural authority are the loci of social conflict. Cultural authority is ambiguous, the product of an “attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation.”²¹ Revivalist women become points of signification of overarching identities, and so are focal points in revivalist attempts to dominate in the name of cultural and religious supremacy. The contention over women’s changing self-presentation as they become absorbed into revivalist projects encapsulates the nature of the identity-politics surrounding the Islamic revival in Pakistan.

THE GLOBAL ISLAMIC REVIVAL

Contemporary Pakistani Islamic movements are influenced by the global Islamic revival, which springs from an intellectual heritage laid out by Imam Muhammad Ghazali (1058–1111) in *The Revival of Religious Science*, in which he argued that existing systems of religious authority and political governance were full of intrinsic impurities, and that the people needed to be mobilized to implement “pure” Islamic religious and political arrangements.²² Ghazali saw a two-stage Islamic revival; he argued that first, the people’s Islamic sensibilities should be reawakened, and then radical political action should be taken to create a properly Islamic state. Nineteenth and twentieth century reformers drew on Ghazali and a long-standing heritage of reformism to find modes of expression that could be effective in a colonial situation.²³

Contemporary Islamic movements operating in Pakistan either “have their origin in the colonial period or are successors of those movements. The most important among them want(ed) to unify and homogenize the religious community” during the period of colonial rule.²⁴ Among the currently operating movements that have their origin in this period are the *Tablighi Jama’at*, established in 1926 by Maulana Muhammad Illyas, and the *Jama’at Islami*, founded in 1941 by Abu A’la Maududi.²⁵ At the time they were founded, both of these movements promoted a Muslim identity cleansed of corrupting colonial taint, positioning the internalization of both British and Hindu values as one of the reasons for the decline of Muslim power in India.²⁶ At the same time, these movements delineated a spectrum of revivalist responses to colonization; and even today as through the twentieth century, the *Jama’at Islami* promotes ideas of political reform, while the *Tablighi Jama’at* focuses on individual spiritual renewal as a key to creating widespread social change.

Islamic revivalist movements in the twentieth century, including the *Tablighi Jama’at* and the *Jama’at Islami*, diverged ideologically as to the means of creating Islamic reform but shared a number of common beliefs, which contemporary revivalists of these and other groups subscribe to. The first of these was that all reform

must be rooted in Islamic sacred texts, which describe the idealized Islam practiced in the “Time of the Prophet.” The second was that the loss of Muslim empire to western colonialism reflected a vast spiritual decline among Muslims, and that once the spiritual decline was reversed, Muslims would automatically regain worldly dominance. This belief that a return to authentic religious values would result in a return to worldly power was shared by a range of Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh movements in colonial India.²⁷ This focus on individual spiritual renewal is emphasized by much of the literature on the Islamic Revival.²⁸

Mahmood has argued that the term “Islamic Revival” covers the activities of not only “state-oriented political groups,” but also

more broadly to a religious ethos or sensibility that has developed within contemporary Muslim societies . . . manifest in the vast proliferation of neighborhood mosques and other institutions of Islamic learning and social welfare, in a dramatic increase in attendance at mosques by both women and men, and in marked displays of religious sociability.²⁹

Contemporary Islamic movements across the world create visions of a transnational Muslim *ummah*, or community of believers, who reject western influences in favor of a “pure” Islam, marked by sartorial changes and increased adherence and reference to the Islamic sacred texts, the Qur’an and Hadith, as a means of organizing everyday life.³⁰ This repudiation of western modes of social organization is prominent in the literature of the global Islamic Revival, which attempts to “establish Islam as the only viable alternative to what is increasingly described as a decadent and morally bankrupt western society.”³¹ Muslims participating in this movement feel themselves to be “in dialog not only with western writers and ideas, but with western culture itself.”³² While ostensibly focused on personal piety, these Islamic movements are inherently political in their challenge to the societies in which they function. Revivalist movements globally demarcate the boundaries of appropriate behavior, especially through the medium of women, who are called on to implement social and religious reform in their sartorial expression, religious practice, and daily activities. Strong reactions to changes in women’s dress and behavior³³ in contemporary Pakistan signal the importance of women to the creation of Pakistani identities, coupled with an anxiety regarding the corruption of Muslim culture that dates back to the colonial era of identity-formation which preceded the partition of India. Thus, in both the colonial and postcolonial eras, women became the markers for both inscribing and enforcing religious and cultural purity in Islam.

WOMEN AND COLONIAL IDENTITIES

Contemporary Pakistani scrutiny of women as vehicles of culture and religion is influenced by the sub-continent’s colonial past, specifically the British focus on the conversion of communities through the education of women. Driven by Victorian ideology that regarded women as moral centers of their home, British missionaries and colonial administrators attempted to create cultural change through legislation and educational reform targeting women. “Colonial feminism,”³⁴ in which the British presented themselves as rescuing Indian women from their cultures and religions,³⁵

led to a number of colonial educational interventions targeting upper- and middle-class women, as well as lower-class women.³⁶ Indian intellectuals internalized the critique that Indian women were in need of reform, but were unwilling to make the construction of “new” women an issue of negotiation with the colonial state.

The construction of the Indian woman became a project directed by male Indian intellectuals, who intervened in the domestic realms in order to create women reflecting the imagined communities they were bringing into being. Later in the mid-twentieth century, during the intensified period of identity-formulation surrounding the partition of India, different constituencies emerged and positioned themselves in relation to each other through semiotic cues. This period featured an intense focus on the idea of culture; nationalist reformers promoting the creation of a Muslim nation-state argued that the Hindu and Muslim communities in India were not only different from the West, but were both also culturally and religiously distinct from each other.³⁷ Women’s dress, behavior, and education were understood to lay out the boundaries of these communities, separating them from not only their colonial others, but also from the other religious communities surrounding them.

These new ideas of women as repositories of emergent national identities opened them to significant amounts of male scrutiny and control.³⁸ Hindu and Muslim reformers attempted to redefine women’s roles, subjecting them to a “new patriarchy.”³⁹ Partition-era reformers enlisted women as guardians of indigenous culture, while demonstrating a deep concern that women not become “westernized” or otherwise culturally tainted.⁴⁰ Multiple religious and political movements created templates for female dress, education, and social behavior to produce an identity distinct from that of “other” communities. Islamic reformers anchored their interpretations of the reformed woman in Islamic texts, and in the visualization of an Islamic heritage lost because of women’s absorption of foreign values. The emergent nation of Pakistan was imagined as populated by a new kind of Muslim woman, one who followed a purely Islamic culture. Significantly, even those reformers who were not affiliated with the religious establishment, such as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, were wary of the danger of women becoming too much like western or Hindu women. Indian Muslim reformers also shared a widespread opposition to women wearing British clothing or to learning to read and write in English.⁴¹

Movements of reform in India through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century promoted visions of “new” women, while also creating and circulating images of women corrupted by foreign culture to demonstrate the harmful consequences of women’s blind adoption of foreign norms. Much of the nationalist literature of this period focuses on the threatened westernization of Indian women.⁴² Similarly, much of the Muslim reformist literature dwells on the “Hinduization” of Muslim women, who are described as having internalized the values of their Hindu neighbors and friends. Religious movements in contemporary Pakistan draw on these historical images of women corrupted by competing foreign cultural influences to demarcate the boundaries of acceptable identities and to portray non-revivalist women as culturally tainted through their absorption of the values of hostile outsiders. Thus the figure of the ideal Muslim woman emerging from the Islamic revivalist movements in contemporary Pakistan has its origin in the discursive genealogies of Muslim responses to women during colonial rule. This historical parallel leads to the following questions: (1) What manner of ideal society are contemporary revivalist women meant to embody? (2) In what ways do

these visions conflict with existing beliefs regarding women’s responsibilities and social roles? and (3) How do revivalist claims to identity influence these movements’ increasing appeal to Pakistani women? The story of these revivalist movements’ call to women offers us a fresh way to re-engage with these questions.

ISLAMIC REVIVALIST MOVEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY URBAN PAKISTAN

The religious ideology and activities of Pakistani religious movements today demonstrate a variety of engagements with nationalism and the nation-state. The *Jama’at Islami* focuses on top-down political change and the implementation of Islamic law, while the *Tablighi Jama’at* sees personal spiritual awakenings as the key to overall social uplift.⁴³ These movements are joined on the landscape of contemporary urban Pakistan by a number of emergent movements promoting ideas of Islamic reform, including the recent and popular *Al-Huda* movement, rooted in the Al-Huda Welfare Trust established in 1994. Some of these movements, including *Al-Huda*, fall under the umbrella of what Olivier Roy considers “neo-fundamentalism”⁴⁴ in their lack of explicit political agenda.

The *Tablighi Jama’at*’s oral culture means that the movement does not publish policy documents, and its few official leaders do not participate in the public discourse concerning the movement.⁴⁵ During interviews conducted during my research, both men and women affiliated with the movement reiterated that the movement was explicitly apolitical. My informant Asma told me: “Of course I care about the political situation. But we (i.e. *Tablighis*) believe that once people have been changed, the world will change.” This emphasis on non-political change is the primary theme of the *Tablighi Jama’at*, and is referenced at many of their group events. Al-Huda follows a similar pattern, and its leader Farhat Hashmi’s refusal to comment on political issues is well known.⁴⁶ In contrast, the *Jama’at Islami*’s literature and history make it clear that the movement’s explicit goal is to gain political power in order to transform Pakistan into an Islamic State. The movement’s English language website proclaims:

Some people say to us “why do you take part in politics,” But we believe that religion and politics if cut into two, the remainder is always barbarity (a trait of Ganges Khan), and if people want us to preach only in masque and let politics degenerate into (into barbarity). What a religion they want us to preach? They want us to practice Christian Theocracy? A religion which has nothing to do with politics, But we do not believe in such a religion our religion is base on Quran and Sunnah, we not only take part in politics but we regard it as an integral part of our religion (sic).⁴⁷

Despite their differences, Islamic movements are tied together through their overarching teaching related to women; all of these movements see women as an important component of social change, and all of them recruit and train women through *dars*, religious classes that draw on the Islamic sacred texts, the Qur’an and Hadith. These movements’ *dars* all promote similar sartorial and social interventions, marking out the revivalist woman as distinct from other Pakistani women. Their collective teachings include asking women to veil their hair and faces, wear long loose coats over their clothing (*abayas*), and limit their attendance and participation at a number

of common social and religious gatherings. Each movement anchors these reforms in the Islamic sacred texts, the Qur'an and Hadith, and points to Islamic history as evidence that their interpretations of these texts are correct.

The media of their home countries often accuse Islamic revivalists of importing foreign values and culture, and of being in the pay of foreign powers.⁴⁸ Pakistani revivalists reverse this accusation, arguing that all non-revivalist forms of identity are sourced from Pakistan's ideological enemies by agents too malicious or naive to realize their self-presentation reflects an internal conquest by forces hostile to Pakistan. Globally, revivalist movements argue that adherence to an idealized Islam requires a rejection of all cultural artifacts not based in Islamic sacred texts; in Pakistan, revivalists not only discard existing Pakistani cultural and religious structures, but argue that they themselves possess the only authentic Pakistani culture. Since the formation of the country, Islam has been the sole basis for a unified Pakistani national identity in a country full of ethnic and linguistic diversity, and since that time historians "chasing Pakistan's mirage in the Arabian desert bridge the temporal and spatial distance between the origins of Islam and Pakistan in an imaginative leap"⁴⁹ in order to link Pakistani identity to ideas of Islamic origins and unity. The discourse of contemporary Islamic movements invokes various pasts, and ties their performance of revivalist identities to: (1) the "Islamic" past modeled on the lives of the Prophet and his companions; (2) the Muslim past tied to the history of Islamic Empire; and (3) the recent past lived by their grandparents and great-grandparents. Islamic revivalist movements present themselves as reformers who are bringing to life abandoned religious practices that have deep-seated historical roots. These histories are considered authoritative by the vast majority of Pakistanis, who respect their elders, take pride in the bygone age of Islamic Empire, and revere the Prophet and his companions. These histories lend themselves to visions of an independent Pakistan as an Islamic state, contributing to revivalist arguments that this was the purpose of the creation of the Pakistani nation-state.⁵⁰

Islamic revivalist movements' exponential growth among urban Pakistani women since the 1990s is reflected in the increasing numbers of women adopting sartorial markers associated with the Islamic revival, and withdrawing from hitherto unexceptionable cultural events. Women have been participating in these movements in growing numbers from the late 1990s onward, and increasing numbers of urban Pakistani women are adopting the veil and implementing revivalist reforms in their daily lives and interactions with others. Upper- and middle-class Pakistani women's adoption of Islamic piety markers over the past decade have sparked strong reactions among their peers and led to a vibrant public discourse regarding gendered piety which leads to understanding the trajectories of these fault-lines.

A number of interrelated factors contribute to women's increased participation in revivalism. These include a growing public discourse about Islam and authority, changing roles for women within revivalist movements, and the increased outreach and recruitment efforts revivalist movements aim at young women. A number of TV talk shows during the Musharraf era (1999–2008) popularized the idea that there were different "brands" of Islamic practice, and young women began to see education in sacred texts as a means of determining which of these was authoritative. Large private TV networks emerged, including GEO TV and the ARY digital network, and hosted shows focusing exclusively on religion and Islamic practice in Pakistan. These shows contributed to the emergence of popular televangelists, such as Aamir Liaquat

Hussain⁵¹ and Javed Ghamdi, who mobilized audiences traditional religious leaders were unable to reach,⁵² including urban middle- and upper-class women. Women were increasingly courted by groups offering “classes” in Islamic knowledge – the flyer below, posted at the entrance to one of Islamabad’s most exclusive teaching hospitals, provides an example of this trend.

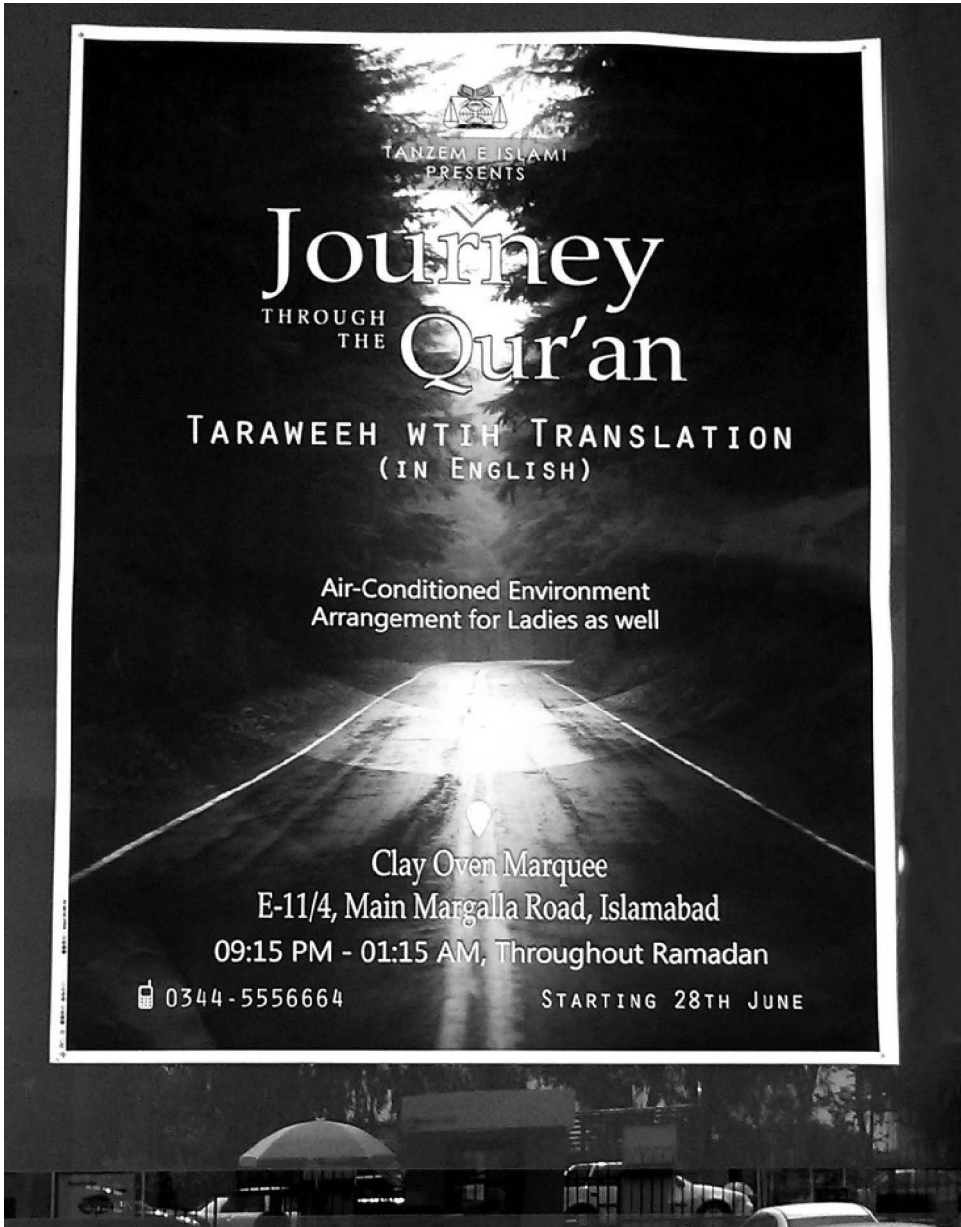


Figure 11.1 *Journey Through the Qur'an*.
Source and Permission: Author, Meryem Zaman.

During this increasing public discourse regarding Islamic authority, revivalist movements increased their offerings for women and began giving female leaders large roles in the pedagogy of revivalism both within movement-space and outside it; the *Al-Huda* movement popularized a phenomenon in which women served as the religious teachers introducing female students to sacred texts and reformed religious practice and other revivalist movements followed suit, reluctantly conceding that women were effective in leadership roles in certain (segregated) domains. Revivalists continue to present these women-led recruitment classes as value-neutral “educational” settings which teach Islamic sacred texts. In so doing, they continue to attract a growing market of young women who are interested in learning for themselves what the Qur’an and Hadith require of them. Revivalist movements tap into these emerging publics, offering systematized instruction in Islamic sacred texts and their (theoretically neutral) interpretations. For instance, summer classes in Qur’an and Hadith are promoted on billboards in Pakistani cities, and many young women and men attend. Some of these ads, like the flyer above, are explicitly designed to attract middle- and upper-class women; some mention the “air-conditioned venues” “appropriate for ladies” at the class.

Young women are often sent to Qur’an classes regardless of their families’ religio-political orientation. The behavior these classes promote dovetails neatly with contemporary, religiously inflected Pakistani values related to virtuous womanhood. Specifically, values related to female chastity are given high premium in both revivalist and non-revivalist values systems. Sadaf Ahmad has documented instances where parents eventually find themselves dismayed at the extent to which their daughters come to subscribe to revivalist ideology.⁵³ Parents who are initially pleased at their daughters’ acquisition of dutiful conduct towards their parents, increased domestic service, and renewed commitment to ideas of chastity often find themselves dismayed when their daughters adopt various forms of veiling and refuse to attend social events on the grounds that these events are “un-Islamic.” Such contradictions in expectations for women are not uncommon. These movements beckon women to lives of virtue, but their families and society more generally do not want their piety to extend to self-chosen social exclusions. These fault-lines create various antagonistic encounters, as is apparent from my ethnographic surveys below.

REVIVALIST NARRATIVES AND COUNTER-NARRATIVES ABOUT WOMEN

I draw on ethnographic methodology to unpack the contestations surrounding Pakistani identities, and the Othering maneuvers that construct and maintain them. Ethnography can be defined as

the description of cultural systems or an aspect of culture based on fieldwork in which the investigator is immersed in the ongoing everyday activities of the designated community for the purpose of describing the social context, relationships and processes relevant to the topic under consideration.⁵⁴

As a methodology, “ethnography is actively situated between powerful systems of meaning . . . [it] decodes and recodes, telling the grounds of collective order and

diversity, inclusion and exclusion.⁵⁵ It is uniquely suited to tracing individual articulations of identity expressed during daily activities. Ethnographic methods have proved essential to escaping the archive and capturing the “dispersed moments and fragments”⁵⁶ through which everyday realities can be represented. Through ethnographic methods, I examine the routine interactions through which agents construct and maintain identity-positions; this study requires close observation of daily life and engagements. I conducted fieldwork in Pakistan’s urban centers of Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi over the course of four years, from June 2007 to August 2011. My research focused on both revivalist and non-revivalist subjects and interrogated the processes through which revivalist identities were formed and positioned socially. Interviewees were chosen based on social proximity, and a variety of methods were employed to assess their positioning of themselves along a socio-political scale.

My informants, both revivalists and non-revivalist, displayed a deep concern with Pakistan’s shifting religious landscape, and their positionality within it. In interviews, they described their attempts to situate themselves within a complex network of identity-positions, while participant-observation research revealed their beliefs regarding the connection of specific identities to colonial pasts and postcolonial futures. Often, I observed interactions in which my revivalist female subjects’ routine sartorial practices or social maneuverings were part of a process of constructing themselves as demonstrating authentic Pakistani culture as well as “pure” Islamic sensibilities. Similarly, non-revivalist informants would often discursively position revivalists as “extreme” and “foreign.”

Scholars have noticed that urban Pakistanis posit what they see as a natural opposition between women who veil and women who do not.⁵⁷ At the same time, women’s veiling is a relatively new phenomenon among middle- and upper-class Pakistanis. My informant Mishal, the wife of a government functionary in Islamabad, told me that when she moved to the city in the 1970s, none of her contemporaries veiled: “None of the officers’ wives did *purdah* (institutionalized veiling),” she said. “It was not popular at all. If you saw a woman in a *niqab* (face veil), you knew she was lower-class.” Seher, a Pakistani-expatriate living in New York, recalled an encounter she had had during a trip to Pakistan in 1995 when she was twenty. “I went to a party wearing my headscarf,” she said,

and two boys started talking about me in English, saying “where do you think the *masi* (maid) got jeans?” Then one of them walked over to me, and asked in Urdu “where did you get your jeans?” I responded in my most pronounced American accent “actually, I got them at Bloomingdales.” Those boys were flabbergasted, and then they just melted away after stammering apologies.

This encounter and the earlier conversation illustrate the then somewhat rare nature of veiling among the Pakistani elite, as well as the global currents that were fueling the Islamic revival globally.

Urban Pakistani women occupy diverse roles including but not limited to: homemaker, career professional, mother, wife, sister, and daughter-in-law. In Pakistan, all of these roles require intense emotional labor and accountability to immediate and extended family members, in part because this unpaid labor performs welfare

functions abandoned by the state.⁵⁸ Upon joining a revivalist movement, women begin to negotiate the extent to which conformity to customary gender roles are required of them by an idealized Islam, and reject previously unexceptionable social and religious activities as evidence of cultural taint. Revivalist identity-politics challenge existing Pakistani cultural, social, and religious gatherings by claiming that they either: (1) involve music and dancing, both considered religiously impermissible by revivalists; (2) are evidence of *mushabihat* (imitation of other cultures) of either “the West” or India; or (3) that they are *bid’ah* (religious innovations inspired by non-Muslims). All three of these categories identify those who engage in these events as blind imitators of foreign groups, and as impious Muslims.

The popularity of the practices they discard makes revivalist identity maneuvers contentious; revivalists condemn as “un-Islamic” a wide variety of events, which include religious and cultural events. Many revivalist women stop attending popular Pakistani religious gatherings under the grounds that they are *bid’ah* (innovations) that became part of the religion after the death of the Prophet, and that these ceremonies have become part of Islamic practice in Pakistan because of religious syncretism between the Muslim and Hindu communities in India. The religious gatherings revivalists withdraw from include *chalesewans* and *kuls*, in which people gather together to pray for the souls of the deceased. Revivalists also do not attend *urs* (the celebrations of saints’ death days), and attempt to prevent others from attending these events. My revivalist informants from *Al-Huda*, the *Tablighi Jama’at*, and the *Jama’at Islami* also boycott a number of popular cultural events, including weddings and birthday parties, while expressing the belief that they are required to prevent others from attending these events as part of an act of cultural as well as religious reform. Nilofur, a middle-aged woman who became a devout member of *Al-Huda* over the course of my research, mentioned once in class that she had been instrumental in preventing her sister from going to an *urs*: “I said to her, ‘why would you participate in such ignorance (*jahalat*)?’”⁵⁹ and described how *urs* is the result of Hindu rituals, and eventually she decided not to go.”

The following conversation, which I observed in an introductory *Jama’at Islami* class for women,⁶⁰ illustrates the theme of cultural corruption and identity formation that runs through revivalist narratives and underlies their hostility towards prevailing Pakistani modes of sociability.

- | | |
|--|---|
| Urooj: | The things this world considers good, God considers them bad. The things the world considers bad, God considers good. We should not do <i>mushabihat</i> of others. Birthdays and anniversaries and <i>urs</i> , these are not part of our tradition. Life is an exam. If we refrain from attending these events, we will pass, and go to <i>jannah</i> (heaven). |
| Samina (tentatively raising her hand): | But what about being good to one’s relatives? My sister in law always has a big birthday party for her son. If I don’t go, she will not like it. |
| Urooj: | No, you are here to learn, and this is one of the things we have to learn. When our relatives are doing wrong things, when they do <i>bid’ah</i> and <i>mushabihat</i> , we have to not go. This is doing the right thing – eventually, they might also learn that these things |

are bad. If she asks, tell her that birthdays are a thing we got from the West.

The question is going around, what brand of Islam should we follow?

We follow the brand of Islam, made in Mecca and Medina, which is 1400 years old! It is not contemporary, and it is eternal.

I do not give you permission to attend birthdays. Birthdays are an innovation, and we did not have birthdays before – why are we imitating the West? We can give people presents any time, but we should not go to birthdays.

A number of the other women in the class chimed in to tell stories about how they had stopped attending birthday parties and weddings. “At first,” remembered Neelum, who had been attending the classes for three years:

There was a lot of pressure on me, and whenever I did not go to something, my mother-in-law would call me and pressure me to go. My husband didn’t like it either, but he got used to it. Now he understands that these things are against our culture and our religion. All of these birthdays, this dancing at weddings, all of these *dholki*,⁶¹ these are part of the culture of our enemies.

Urooj added: I remember we didn’t even have *dholkis* until fifteen years ago – they came here from all of the Indian movies we watch. What kind of thing is this, that they try to destroy our country, and we pick up their ways?

The above conversation illustrates the way in which participating in events revivalists disapprove of are framed as culturally inauthentic as well as irreligious. Participating in these events is presented as complicity with the “enemies of Pakistan,” and refraining from attending is presented as an identity-related maneuver, instead of being tied purely to religion. Revivalist women present women who attend these events as not only bad Muslims, but as collaborators with Pakistan’s cultural and political enemies. These conversations also evoke the rigid nationalist politics of India and Pakistan.

The following conversation in the *Al-Huda* class I researched illustrates further the theme of authentic cultural identity that runs through Pakistan’s Islamic movements.

Rabia: In my days of ignorance (*jahalat*), I too wore jeans. But now I don’t. Now I wear the hijab (veil), even though these days, the hijab has been made synonymous with ignorance.⁶²

Fatima: Actually, if you stood a *jeans-wali* (a woman with jeans) and a *hijab-wali* (woman with headscarf) together, the *hijab-wali* will be more talented.

Rabia: The thing is to accept what you learn here. If you are wearing short sleeves with hijab, or jeans and hijab, you have not accepted the message. Both of my sisters, even now, wear jeans.

Our hearts are somewhere else. We have not understood things properly. People say to me, “why do you oppose jeans?” I say – “am I mad that

- I would oppose jeans?” It is just that we have been forbidden from adopting the clothes of the *Yahud* (Jewish people) and the *Nasara* (Christians).
- Fatima: We have the equivalent of the jean, we have the trouser. We only want to do fashion, right? I have understood that if I wear jeans, my heart is somewhere else, and my head is somewhere else. Once I have accepted this, this is what I have to do. I miss my jeans sometimes, but it is alright.
- Rabia: I don’t like any of this, either. Believe me, I don’t enjoy any of this.
I like jeans, I have worn them, I enjoy it, I still find them comfortable. I don’t wear them anymore because it is the garb of *Kafirs* (non-Muslims). The women who wear jeans are wrong, because they did not accept in their hearts who they are.
- Nazish: It is so hard to not get pulled in to wrong things. There are so many *bid’ahs*, in happiness and sadness, in weddings and funerals. You have to be separate from others if you want to be true to our culture. When we were raising our children in the UK, we kept a tight watch on them. We didn’t let them go to other people’s birthdays because this is a non-Muslim thing, and if we had let them go, we would have also had to invite people and hold birthdays ourselves.

The above conversation delineates the ways in which my revivalist subjects’ praxis is part of a thought-out assertion of authentic cultural identity that positions them vis-à-vis ideological others, primarily “the West,” “Hindus,” “Christians,” and “Jews.” In daily encounters with non-revivalist women, my informants express their belief that Pakistanis who participate in activities identified as “*mushabihat*” or “*bid’ah*” are causing cultural dilution and contributing to an ongoing corruption of Pakistani culture and religion that dates back to the colonial past, when co-residence with the British and Hindu communities caused cultural adulteration.

Revivalist appeals to Pakistani nationalism and the idea of an exclusively Pakistani identity are potent because they echo colonial era identity-formation maneuvers. Non-revivalist Pakistanis seem more offended by challenges to their national/cultural identity than by accusations of impiety, and a number of newspaper articles and everyday conversations attempt to defend particular ceremonies from the accusation that they are of “Hindu” origin. The example of Basant, a spring festival common to Pakistan and India, illustrates the consternation urban Pakistanis demonstrate over the idea that their celebrations might have Indian roots. Numerous newspaper articles argue that Basant, rather than being of Hindu origin, is “a centuries-old cultural tradition of the Punjab”⁶³ that “heralds the coming of spring, a season of rebirth and renewal in all cultures” which has “no religious connotations.”⁶⁴

The stories of my revivalist informants demonstrate that their non-revivalist families objected to their new affiliation most often when it required them to stop attending social events and participating in religious events they now designate *bid’ah*. None of the revivalist narratives I heard ever featured objections to revivalists’ increased acts of personal piety; praying regularly, fasting, and engaging in increased devotional activities including reciting the Qur’an were generally changes that families at least tolerated, if not approved of. It is when this religious behavior spilled over into challenges to customary Pakistani modes of sociability that my informants encountered domestic conflict. These conflicts were based in their

adoption of revivalist identity-markers, as well as their refusal to obey the culturally mandated hierarchies.⁶⁵

When my informant Komal, a young woman in her early twenties, began attending *Al-Huda* classes and veiling her hair using the traditional *dupatta*,⁶⁶ her parents were pleased. She said, “First my parents were very happy, she is studying religion. Then they thought that maybe she has gone mad.” Key points of conflict centered around her donning the head-scarf and face-veil, and her refusal to dance at weddings.

My parents said that no, you have gone too much towards *deen* (religion). You have become an extremist. My sisters started saying to me “what is this you are doing?” . . . Last year, when my sister got married, I was very pressurized. That “this is enough, now you have to stop this, you aren’t doing the dances that girls are doing.”

Komal’s story culminated in a three-day period in which she was forbidden to leave the house while her family tried to reason with her. Eventually, when they saw she would not be moved, they reluctantly gave way. The stories of women in multiple revivalist movements echo this encounter, in which families are tolerant of their revivalist activities up to a point, but resist them once they become visibly marked in women’s socialization habits and dress. Rabia, Komal’s teacher, was threatened with divorce over her decision to wear the face-veil and teach *Al-Huda* classes. She said that when she started to veil, “there was a lot of difficulty – my in-laws and husband said that because I could not entertain male guests, I wasn’t fulfilling my duty as a wife – they said, ‘give him permission to marry another woman, or leave him.’”

Women from the *Tablighi Jama’at* and the *Jama’at Islami*, movements in which women participate with male relatives, do not experience this degree of conflict with their immediate families, but their extended families often express disapproval of their changed socialization habits, and their rejection of customary social and religious gatherings. My informant Asma, who is an active member of the *Tablighi Jama’at*, hosted a very simple wedding ceremony for her son, in order to avoid all of the *bid’ahs* she believed were associated with conventional Pakistani weddings. She remembered:

people complained, “what kind of wedding is this?” When my younger son got married – there was no ceremony, they went and brought the bride home . . . all of the women in our family . . . became very angry.

CONCLUSION

Women who participate in Islamic revivalist movements in contemporary Pakistan acquire religious and social practices associated with the transnational Islamic revival, including an emphasis on relating their dress and behavior directly to Islamic sacred texts, a rejection of “cultural” activities associated with “the West,” and the cultivation of a piety that is denoted externally as well as at the level of subjectivity. These actions tie them to a global *ummah*, or community of believers, engaged in the process of “renewing” Islam by turning to its putative origins. Thus, while women’s

adoption of sartorial markers of piety and withdrawal from certain social events is one they speak of as a personal decision, it is nonetheless an inherently political action. By designating common events “un-Islamic” and donning what they consider Islamic garb, revivalist women position themselves as a hegemonic unit in opposition to a variety of impure Others who are tainted by corrupting “Hindu” and “Western” habits. Revivalist women draw on logics of equivalence to paint themselves and other agents of the Islamic revival as acting in concert to (re)establish an authentic Pakistani culture and religion against an identifiable enemy, in this case all Pakistanis not committed to ideas of Islamic renewal. For example, women in positions of authority in religious movements, like Rabia and Urooj, frame the condemnation of customary Pakistani social events and acts of sartorial signification as part of an ongoing effort to establish a Pakistani nation affiliated with a global *ummah* and freed of colonial taint.

Why are revivalist identity-politics persuasive in the Pakistani public discourse? The main reason, I argue, is based on the construction of everyday Pakistani events as acts of cultural corruption. Accusations of collaboration with foreign enemies, such as the West and India, are familiar to Pakistanis from identity-formation maneuvers during partition; therefore, revivalist claims to hegemonic identities as both Muslim and Pakistani subjects easily draw on and promote themes of cultural corruption that Pakistanis are familiar with from school history textbooks covering the partition of India.⁶⁷ Revivalist women’s explicit claim that the gatherings they refuse to attend are “Hindu” in origin paints participants in those events as analogues to the Hindu community from which Pakistanis differentiated themselves in the process of creating the Pakistani nation-state.

The colonial history of westernization gives revivalist identity politics in contemporary urban Pakistan a further, charged edge; by identifying customary Pakistani practices as tainted, revivalists position themselves as the true holders of Pakistani as well as Islamic identity, and position their detractors as collaborators with colonial/western masters and cultural antagonists. The linkages revivalists articulate between movement-specific identities and the preservation of a pure and ancient Pakistani culture are historically inaccurate; an examination of Islamic revivalism reveals that Pakistani revivalist identities are a product of contemporary transnational forces, even while they evoke colonial history to give their claims of cultural authenticity weight, and to render them credible in the contest of Pakistani nationalist historiography. These implicit claims underlie revivalist women’s identity-performance, leading non-revivalist Pakistanis to see the acquisition of “Islamic” identities as a form of “extremism.”

When female revivalists adopt semiotic cues linking them to the Islamic revival and promote discourses of cultural and religious purification, they become important “points of signification”⁶⁸ for the articulation of Pakistani Islamic movements’ intertwined claims to Islam and culture. As such, their self-presentation acquires meanings beyond personal piety, and transforms everyday acts of worship into political claims regarding their own cultural authenticity, and the taint of collaboration carried by their non-revivalist Others. If we want to understand the religious, cultural, and political fault-lines in contemporary Pakistan, the emergence of women both accepting and resisting these Islamic revival movements provides a key point of entry into the world of this nation – and of the Muslim *ummah*. In these narratives we can see how

these movements have captured the imaginations of so many contemporary Pakistani women (and men) by enabling them to reinforce a “pure” national identity, which they come to see as the desired end-point of the creation of the nation-state of Pakistan itself.

ENDNOTES

1. Afiya Shehrbano Zia, “Faith-Based Politics, Enlightened Moderation and the Pakistani Women’s Movement.” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 11.1 (2009): 225–245; Aysha Siddiqua, “The Conservatively Hip.” *Newsline*, August 31, 2010.
2. Zia, “Faith Based Politics.”
3. Ayesha Siddiqua, “The Conservatively Hip.”
4. Humaira Iqtidar, *Secularizing Islamists?: Jama’at-e-Islami and Jama’at-ud-Da’wa in Urban Pakistan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Fawzia Afzal-Khan “Betwixt and Between? Women, the Nation and Islamization in Pakistan.” *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 13.1 (2007): 19–29.
5. Asma Jahangir and Hina Jilani, *The Hudood Ordinances: A Divine Sanction?* (Lahore: Rhotas Books, 1990).
6. Ashgar Ali Engineer, “Muslim Women and Modernity.” *Dawn*. April 9, 2010. <http://www.dawn.com/news/529602/muslim-women-and-modernity>. Most prominent among these are claims that the veiling of the face is not required by The Qur’an or Hadith. See also Javed Ahmed Ghamdi, “Ghamdi Kay Saath.” *Samaa TV*. September 20, 2013. <http://www.ghamidiji.com/javedahmadghamidi/women-on-media-and-pardah.html>
7. Peter van der Veer, “Religion in South Asia.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 173–187.
8. *Ibid.*, 173.
9. David Savage, “Missionaries and the Development of a Colonial Ideology of Female Education in India.” *Gender and History* 9.2 (1997): 201–221, 208.
10. *Ibid.*, 211.
11. Van der Veer, “Religion in South Asia,” 176.
12. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 2.
13. These are all prominent religious movements in the urban Pakistani social landscape. Their leaders, structures, and approaches to gendered religious reform are diverse, and they illustrate a significant spectrum of revivalist hierarchy and ideology.
14. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2010), x.
15. Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990).
16. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xiii.
17. Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993), 50.
18. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xiii.
19. These agents include both (typically male) revivalist leaders, who delineate revivalist movements’ ideological positions on everyday Pakistani sociability, and the members of these movements, who implement these positions in their everyday lives and interactions.
20. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 34.
21. *Ibid.*, 34.
22. Ali Rahnama, “Certain Attributes of Islamic Revivalists.” In *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. Ali Rahnama (London: Zed Books, 1994), 4–10, 5.
23. John Obert Voll “Foundations for Renewal and Reform: Islamic Movements in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century.” In *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. John Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 509–548, 547.

24. Van der Veer, "Religion in South Asia," 180.
25. Mumtaz Ahmed, "Islamic Fundamentalism in South Asia: The Jamaat-i-Islami and the Tablighi Jamaat." In *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), 457–530.
26. Ibid. Representations of a cultural community tainted by the absorption of British and Hindu culture were also a prominent part of secular nationalist identity-formation in India during this period.
27. Barbara Metcalf, *'Traditionalist' Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis, and Talibs* (Leiden: ISIM, 2002).
28. Asef Bayat, "Islamism and Social Movement Theory." *Third World Quarterly* 26.6 (2005): 891–908, 891.
29. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3.
30. David Zeidan, *The Resurgence of Religion: A Comparative Study of Selected Themes in Christian and Islamic Fundamentalist Discourses* (London: Brill, 2003), 3.
31. Yvonne Haddad, "The Revivalist Literature and the Literature on the Revival: An Introduction." In *The Contemporary Islamic Revival: A Critical Survey and Bibliography*, ed. Yvonne Haddad, John O. Voll, and John L. Esposito (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1991), 3–23, 9.
32. Ibid., 9.
33. Mimar Rana, "Folds of Radicalisation." *Dawn*, May 19, 2010.
34. Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: The Historic Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
35. Partha Chatterjee, "Tensions of Empire: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India." *American Ethnologist* 16.4 (1989): 622–633; Jyotsna Singh, *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: "Discoveries" of India in the Language of Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 92.
36. Savage, "Missionaries and the Development"; Van der Veer, "Religion in South Asia."
37. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).
38. Barbara Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi's Bibishti Zewar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
39. Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).
40. Chatterjee, *The Nation*.
41. Minault, *Secluded Scholars*.
42. Chatterjee, *The Nation*.
43. Yoginder Sikand, "The Tablighi Jama'at and Politics." *ISIM Newsletter* 13 (2013): 42–45.
44. Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 78.
45. Barbara Metcalf, "Living Hadith in the Tablighi Jama'at." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52.3 (1993): 584–608.
46. Sadaf Ahmad, "Al-Huda and Women's Religious Authority in Urban Pakistan." *The Muslim World* 103.13 (2013): 363–374.
47. Jama'at Islami, "Philosophy," accessed October 4, 2014. <http://jamaat.org/beta/site/page/8>
48. Haddad, "Revivalist Literature."
49. Ayesha Jalal, "Conjuring Pakistan: History as Official Imagining." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27.1 (1995): 73–89, 78.
50. Claims regarding the intentions of Pakistan's founders with regards to Islam's role in the nation themselves serve to index individual Pakistanis' socio-political positioning.

51. Mobeen Azhar, “The Rise of Pakistan’s Televangelists.” *BBC News Magazine*, July 13, 2012. <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-18729683>
52. Mumtaz Ahmed, “Media-Based Preachers and the Creation of New Muslim Publics in Pakistan.” In *Who Speaks for Islam? Muslim Grassroots Leaders and Popular Preachers in South Asia*, ed. Mumtaz Ahmad, Dietrich Reetz and Thomas H. Johnson (Washington, DC: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2010), 1–40.
53. Sadaf Ahmed, *Transforming Faith: The Story of Al-Huda and Islamic Revivalism Among Pakistani Women* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009).
54. American Anthropological Association, “American Anthropological Association Statement on Ethnography and Institutional Review Boards.” 2004. <http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/irb.htm>
55. James Clifford, “Introduction: Partial Truths.” In *The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 2.
56. David Ludden, *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South of South Asia* (London: Anthem Press, 2002), 60.
57. Iqtidar, *Secularizing Islamists?*; Afzal-Khan, “Betwixt and Between?”
58. Valentine Moghadam, “Patriarchy and the Politics of Gender in Modernizing Societies: Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan.” *International Sociology* 7.1 (1992): 35–53, 36.
59. By using the word *jahalat*, specifically tied to overarching Islamic narratives regarding the “days of ignorance” that mankind underwent before the emergence of the Prophet Muhammad, Nilofur is implying that before she joined *Al-Huda*, she was essentially a non-believer, and by extension that the women who wear jeans are also equivalent to non-Muslims.
60. The *Jama’at Islami* offers a number of Qur’an classes as a form of outreach. These classes are open to non-members, and often function as a recruitment tool. Many of the women I encountered at this class said they were not members of the movement, but were attending in order to learn the Qur’an.
61. A *dhholki* (literally drum) is an event held prior to a wedding, in which the friends and family of the bride dance and sing.
62. Here, Rabia is referencing a common revivalist belief, that outside enemies paint “True Muslims” in a bad light in public discourse.
63. Hamid Rashid, “Why Ban Basant?” *The Express Tribune*, March 14, 2012. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/349951/why-ban-basant/%3E/>
64. Irfan Hussain, “Ban the Ban on Basant.” *Dawn*, February 27, 2010. <http://www.dawn.com/news/833002/ban-the-ban-on-basant>
65. It is generally agreed that Pakistani women are subject to the authority of their parents, husbands, and in some cases their in-laws.
66. A *dupatta* is a gauzy shawl considered part of the traditional Pakistani *shalwar kameeze*. It can be worn in a variety of ways, and can be placed on the hair to denote respect or modesty.
67. Jalal, “Conjuring Pakistan,” 78.
68. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 34.

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PART IV

POSTCOLONIAL GEOGRAPHIES
AND SPATIAL PRACTICES



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CHAPTER TWELVE

REPRESENTING POSTCOLONIAL ZANZIBAR IN CONTESTED LITERARY, CULTURAL, AND POLITICAL GEOGRAPHIES



Garth Myers

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the United Republic of Tanzania was embroiled in a long constitutional reform crisis, in which Zanzibar is central. Zanzibar is a semi-autonomous polity within Tanzania, consisting of two main islands, Pemba and Unguja. Zanzibar's relationship to East Africa – politically, culturally and historically – has been a subject of extensive debate for centuries. The islands share a great deal with the Swahili coast, from southern Somalia to northern Mozambique: Zanzibar city Swahili is the language's standard dialect. The Omani Sultanate, which ruled Zanzibar from the 1690s through 1890, established tariffs and control over ports on the entire coast.¹ Oman extended its informal empire inland to Lake Tanganyika in the nineteenth century.² The Sultanate became a British Protectorate in 1890 and was a separate colony from Tanganyika even when the latter shifted from German to British control in 1920, until independence (for Tanganyika in 1961; for Zanzibar in December 1963).

In the postcolonial era, the relationship of Zanzibar and Tanganyika has been fraught with tensions. The two countries established the United Republic of Tanzania on 26 April 1964, just after the January 11 Zanzibar Revolution had created a short-lived People's Republic of Zanzibar.³ The postcolonial era has witnessed many reframings of Zanzibar's relationship to Tanganyika and Swahili relationships to Africa. Similar debates are common across Sub-Saharan Africa since independence. Of the region's more than 50 countries, only two – Ethiopia and Liberia – escaped European colonialism; virtually every country has the potential for struggles over mismatches of national identities and territory. Tensions over borders – geographical and political – national identities, and citizenship have intensified with the waves of democratization and religious extremism since 1990, alongside the vast socioeconomic inequality that has accompanied neoliberal economic policies.⁴ Despite its tiny size, Zanzibar thus exemplifies many of the conflictual tendencies within Africa's cultural geographies in the postcolonial era.

In this chapter, I elucidate several strands of discourse on East Africa's political and cultural geography, centering on the pivotal relationships between Zanzibar and

Tanganyika, and between the Swahili coast and Africa. I concentrate first on three literary voices (novelists Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Abdulrazak Gurnah, and Muhamed Said Abdulla) in the debates on these pivotal relationships.⁵ I look at these three in particular because of their prominence – at different scales, in different ways – in the intellectual articulation of Zanzibar’s geography in relation to East Africa. I argue for adapting a concept discussed in recent literature in postcolonial geography, “planetary indigeneity,”⁶ to articulate a “generous and pluralistic”⁷ understanding of the everyday discourses and life worlds of ordinary Zanzibaris and Swahilis as a route to fully grasping the contested cultural geographies of identity and belonging in the eastern African region. Specifically, I concentrate on the Swahili writings of Muhamed Said Abdulla and the everyday place-naming practices and performances of lived space in Zanzibar to show how Zanzibar is far more than a place for contestation over the revolution, race, or divergent nationalisms. Rather, we see the ways in which the Zanzibar case helps to make tangible this idea of planetary indigeneity, in the ways that *both* Abdulla, as a Swahili novelist, and ordinary Zanzibaris in their everyday lives place value in worldly and inclusive indigenous worldviews. The extraordinarily cosmopolitan character of Zanzibar from at least the nineteenth century onward (and, arguably, from the last two millennia onward) plays an important role, too, in facilitating the possibilities of a planetary form of indigeneity. My argument takes its cues from recent (and not so recent) work on postcolonialism in cultural geography and African studies.⁸

POSTCOLONIAL THEORY, CULTURAL GEOGRAPHIES, INDIGENEITY, AND THE EVERYDAY

Cultural geographers have engaged with postcolonial studies for more than 20 years. Recently, one can sense that “postcolonial perspectives” have “lost some vigor” for geographers, “especially within the context of geography’s fast-changing theoretical predilections.”⁹ A series of essays in 2014 in *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* sought to advance new directions for geographers to reinvigorate postcolonial perspectives. The essays therein take five “speculative pathways” toward understanding geographies of postcolonialism.¹⁰ Among these, the most intriguing for my purposes is that toward “planetary indigeneity,” a (re)valuation of “indigenous ways of being” in light of Gayatri Spivak’s “embrace of indigenous and planetary rhetoric” in postcolonial studies.¹¹ Spivak has argued for conceptualizing the planetary as a “species of alterity” distinct from globalization, which she sees as inseparable from oppressive imperialism.¹² She contends that radical alternative planetary thinking “is perhaps best imagined from the pre-capitalist cultures of the planet.”¹³ And in doing so, she foregrounds their “indigenous ways of being.”¹⁴

Sidaway, Woon, and Jacobs note potential “contradictions” and pitfalls in Spivak’s planetary-indigenous turn, such as questions of whether planetary thinking can be balanced with “indigenous aspirations” or specific histories of “indigenous dispossession.”¹⁵ But actually many scholars are arguing for further exploration of this speculative pathway. Robinson had previously advocated “postcolonializing” the discipline of geography, by prioritizing ordinary “understandings generated in other [formerly colonized] places” beyond the West.¹⁶ In African studies, the move toward

“reclaiming the human sciences and humanities through African perspectives”¹⁷ is rooted in various manifestations of planetary indigeneity, whether in postcolonial anthropology¹⁸ or philosophy,¹⁹ or urban studies.²⁰ Building from Lefebvre, Ato Quayson seeks to show in his study of the everyday life of Accra’s Oxford Street that “urban space has an inherently rhythmic quality that can only be ascertained from modulating our perspectives along diverse vectors of interpretation” that incorporate everyday experiences of ordinary people.²¹ Ignasio Jimu highlights the “everydayness” of place-making in the peri-urban fringes of Blantyre, Malawi.²² Understanding everyday African geographies is increasingly deemed crucial to analysis of rural development dynamics, too, even in unexpected contexts like pirate havens in Somalia.²³ The potential is boundless for insights with global implications, which can arise from an interrogation of the quotidian details of indigenous ways of being and place-making in everyday life.

The commonplace, everyday world of contemporary Africa’s changing cultural geographies and intense contestation of identity challenges any easy solutions; the renewed stress on local indigenous knowledge from Africans is a humble, honest response to the daunting array of enduring stereotypes of “Africa-in-the-world.”²⁴ Yet this turn toward planetary indigeneity also brings us back to the foundations of postcolonial cultural studies, in works like Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, which offers warnings of problems which could inhere to planetary indigeneity as a post-colonial, anti-imperial tactic. As he watched the African colonies gain independence, Fanon cautioned that the “unconditional affirmation of African culture” seemed to have “succeeded the unconditional affirmation of European culture.”²⁵ This process would lead African cultures “up a blind alley” of essentialism; this left the national consciousness of the newly independent states as “an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what might have been.”²⁶ Fanon sought to “combat both imperialism and orthodox nationalism by a counter-narrative of great deconstructive power,” but without falling victim to “nativism used as a private refuge.”²⁷ This struggle against both the empty shell of a false consciousness of constructed elite nationalisms *and* the reactionary tendencies of nativism is powerfully present in postcolonial Zanzibar, such as in the dramatic contrast I discuss below between revolutionary socialist elites’ representation of Zanzibar’s revolution and the reactionary representations produced by those elites’ opponents. Although it is hardly without its own pitfalls, the pathway to the liberation of consciousness may lead through the “possibility of a more generous and pluralistic vision of the world” that is built, not from nativism, but from a rooted-yet-worldly sense of place that valorizes everyday indigenous worldviews, within a world of such views.²⁸ Edward Said’s reading of Fanon sought to move beyond simplistic renderings of him as the prince of anti-colonial violence, and to seek ways of redeploying his work for “reconceiving human experience in non-imperialist terms.”²⁹ To Said, “moving beyond nativism” with Fanon entails “thinking of local identity as not exhaustive . . . not being anxious to confine oneself to one’s own sphere, with its ceremonies of belonging, its built-in chauvinism, its limiting sense of security.”³⁰ I begin the exploration of that pathway with three literary takes on Zanzibari and Swahili-coast connective intersections to East Africa’s cultural-political geographies, from Ngũgĩ, Gurnah, and Abdulla, though concentrating most of my attention on Abdulla.

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES OF EAST AFRICA, ZANZIBAR, AND THE SWAHILI WORLD

The first two authors, Ngũgĩ and Gurnah, eloquently illustrate the common polarities of Zanzibar's dis/connection with Tanganyika and East Africa. Ngũgĩ has long been a canonical African voice of postcolonial literary studies, mixing Marxist and African nationalist ideologies in essays and novels, alongside rich geographical description. In his essay, "Matigari and the Dreams of One East Africa," Ngũgĩ poignantly lays out a pan-Africanist cultural geography of the region, recalling a cosmopolitan *Ramadhan* feast in Dar-es-Salaam in 1987. The cosmopolitan friends assembled for the feast then went fishing at midnight in the ocean. Ngũgĩ remembers that evening as a means of celebrating East Africa as "a kaleidoscope of colors, cultures and contours of history."³¹ The ocean journey sets Ngũgĩ "fishing in the waterways of history, waters which had seen the rise and fall of these peculiarly East African cities whose cosmopolitan culture" had been well embodied in that night's gathering. He argues for the oneness of East Africa, seeing the "map of the physical features of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania" as a "sketch of a bust of a human head wearing a slightly flat Muslim cap."³² Much of the essay consists of loving landscape and place descriptions and his dream of a "politically united region as a prelude to the United States of Africa."³³

Although he mentions Zanzibar briefly in this essay, Ngũgĩ does not make any reference to the Zanzibar revolution or the Zanzibar-Tanganyika union. To its chief architect and leader from 1964–1985, Julius Nyerere, that union was the first physical step toward a "United States of Africa." Almost from the beginning, though, the union achieved very little unity. Nyerere even acknowledged that Zanzibar was "a headache for us. . . . If I could tow that island [sic] out into the middle of the Indian Ocean, I'd do it."³⁴ Most recently, this "headache" has rocked efforts for constitutional reform, particularly after a 2008 speech when Tanzania's Prime Minister dismissed Zanzibar's right to join the Organization of Islamic Countries separately from the United Republic because, he said, "Zanzibar is not a country."³⁵

That claim would not surprise the second major voice on the subject of East African unity, Zanzibari novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah. In *Desertion*, Gurnah roams the region's waters of history and geography much like Ngũgĩ does in the "Matigari" essay, beginning in colonial coastal Kenya, ending in the postcolonial police state of Zanzibar. Gurnah, too, imagines a map – this one of all of Africa in the 1950s – with "four predominant colours, red shading to pink for the British-ruled territories, dark green for the French, purple for the Portuguese and brown for the Belgians."³⁶ This map's colonial colors were "a code for a world-view . . . a way of understanding the world . . . a way of dreaming about journeys that could only be pictured in the imagination."³⁷ This geographical worldview's clarity has disappeared in the postcolonial era, according to the novel's narrator, since the "world has become much more confusing. . . . Nothing much is left to the imagination now, when the picture has become the story."³⁸ The picture Gurnah describes in this novel is, as it is in nearly every Gurnah novel, that of the "violence . . . mass slaughter, and . . . terror that had overwhelmed our home": the bloody Zanzibar revolution, its pogroms, and the human consequences for those caught in its midst.³⁹ His previous novel, *Admiring Silence*, captures the tensions of identity and

belonging that surround the revolution and memories of it, all of which, he states as follows:

brought shocking things to the surface. We liked to think of ourselves as a moderate and mild people. Arab African Indian Comorian: we lived alongside each other, quarreled and sometimes intermarried. Civilized, that's what we were. . . . In reality, we were nowhere near *we*, but us in our separate yards, locked in our historical ghettos.⁴⁰

Like many Zanzibaris exiled or imprisoned following the revolution and the union with Tanganyika, Gurnah displays great suspicion for the pan-Africanist vision. Unlike many of those exiled voices, though, Gurnah is also less sanguine toward a re-mapping of Zanzibari and Swahili identities in the postcolonial era that ties the coast to Arabian and Islamic identities.⁴¹

Glassman argues that

the [Zanzibar] revolution has taken its place in historical mythology as either the inevitable outcome of centuries of racial oppression at the hands of Arab 'feudalists' and slaveholders or the culmination of an imperialist campaign to divide and cripple the Zanzibar nation.⁴²

Certainly, the nationalist ideology of the United Republic Africanized the Zanzibar Revolution, as a moment of liberation, almost precisely as Fanon might have predicted.⁴³ Old guard anti-revolutionaries sought to do so as well, for the reverse reasons: to portray the horrors of both revolution and union as the work of "Nyerere the Destroyer" and mainland "Bantus," since true Zanzibaris, as Arab-oriented, peace-loving Muslims, would never have committed such atrocities.⁴⁴ Typical anti-revolutionary discursive tactics are ham-handed by comparison to Gurnah's lyrical writing, but they generally belong in a similar camp, and one that follows Fanon's depressing script perfectly.⁴⁵

In these two contrasting directions, then, we have tendencies toward the false consciousness of nationalism and that of nativism as a private refuge. More complex and hidden voices, which may lead toward the kind of postcolonial planetary indigeneity that Sidaway, Woon, and Jacobs suggest as a speculative pathway, are lost in this dualistic typology, though.⁴⁶ Zanzibari novelist Muhamed Said Abdulla is one such voice. Abdulla survived, somehow, the experience of watching from his hiding place as his family was shot to death for their alleged support of the overthrown Sultanate. After enduring this horror, Abdulla still managed to write a series of popular and entertaining novels in Kiswahili that followed his detective alter ego, Bwana Msa, while subtly revealing many nuances of Zanzibari culture. Several novels became staples of Kiswahili language and literature courses in Zanzibar, the mainland, and around the world.

In his only published nonfiction collection of essays, Abdulla edges, gingerly, ever playfully, toward political issues, and produces an entirely different vision of East Africa's geography, and Zanzibar's relation to the mainland of Africa and the world, than that of Ngũgĩ or Gurnah. In his essay, "The Definition of 'Shamba,'" he begins his delineation of the distinction between the "shamba" [countryside] and "mjini"

[in the town] by referencing what he calls a “cold dream” that he had, in which the island of Unguja [Zanzibar] is placed inside the African mainland of Tanganyika. He comes back to the dream several times in the essay: “If we return to our thesis of taking Unguja end to end and putting it inside Tanganyika, it will not take much time before we see Unguja being swallowed whole together with its *shamba*.”⁴⁷

Although this dream reference (and, again, one with a map!) might be read as a reactionary Zanzibari nationalist retort toward the mainland, it is not. It comes within a government-sanctioned publication, in a clever essay that builds directly from the indigenous, everyday Swahili world. First, Abdulla immediately counters his vision of Zanzibar swallowed by Tanganyika as a “cold dream” by saying that for *him* it “brought a breeze that consoled and entertained my soul with a picture that invigorated my thoughts.”⁴⁸ He toys with the Swahili reader throughout the essay, playing off of subtle differences in Swahili word usage between the mainland and the islands. Mainlanders do not (or did not then) use the term *shamba* when referring to their farms. Tanganyikan Swahili has many other words – *viunga*, *konde*, *migunda* – for farms or plantations, but not the overarching term, *shamba*, that Zanzibari Swahili speakers had borrowed long ago (in the 1770s) from the French (*champ*) word for countryside or field. The specific usage began in reference to clove plantations (French planters had brought clove trees from Mauritius), but it gradually spread to encompass everything that was not the town (Figure 12.1). Abdulla’s Zanzibar is thus “divided into only two segments, that’s it: town and *shamba*.”⁴⁹ What would happen



Figure 12.1 The shamba lands of the hills north and east of Zanzibar town in the neighborhood of Mtufaani (By the Apple Tree).
Source and Permission: Author, Garth Myers.

to the *shamba*, hypothetically, in such a huge country like Tanganyika, were it to swallow Zanzibar? Abdulla argues that Tanganyikans didn't know what to make of the *shamba*, and he gives the literal example of how his use of the word was changed in the mainland publication of his first novel because the Tanganyikan editor "didn't know what a *shamba* was."⁵⁰

Always a master of indirection – his alter ego, Bwana Msa, uses a fictitious book called *The Opposite of Things* as his philosophical guide in solving mysteries – Abdulla takes the most basic geography of Zanzibar and cleverly makes a case for its cultural liberation, amidst its emplacement inside Africa. He makes no claims for an Arabist or Islamicist vision of Zanzibar, as he makes fun of what Said called the "built-in chauvinism" and "ceremonies of belonging" of both Zanzibaris and mainlanders. Another essay has Abdulla taking on the revolutionary regime's government-owned Bwawani Hotel, in a similarly backhanded way. This was for many years the only hotel on the islands at all, built on top of the previously vibrant Zanzibar city neighborhood of Funguni, a sand-spit extending from the port-side neighborhood of Malindi, where Abdulla had been born and raised. The essay begins with a hyperbolic run-on sentence praising the hotel, rife with the indirection/misdirection common to everyday discourse among Zanzibaris:

To see those little structures, many of which were so broken down as to stop you dead in your tracks stunned by the mercy of God; to see the woes which surrounded those shacks with importunity and intensity – those scars and cavities that had ripened on that sand-spit [*funguni*] . . . a place that a native of Malindi like me knew and got used to appreciating for this condition of brutality and misfortune; to see that the huts and alleys of Funguni have vanished, and that on top of them stands a massive building, lovely and glittering, is to witness the impossible marvels of the world, like leaving old age and returning to childhood, or like going around in torn clothing, in tatters, every day, and then getting to wear lace and satin.⁵¹

Yet Abdulla goes from this effusive praise to a subtle indictment of the regime, in noting that the old Funguni performed the same role as the Bwawani – receiving visitors from abroad – since Funguni was a neighborhood of immigrants. He defends the character of the old Funguni; it "wasn't a good place to live, and those who lived there did so because they had to – they didn't have any other options."⁵² But they made the best of it with creativity and subterfuge. He ends the essay by noting that the old Funguni welcomed visitors with the refuge of dry land and glittering sand after weeks at sea; the new invited visitors to swim in its pool – and again a Swahili literary double entendre emerges, since a *bwawa* is a swimming pool, but also can mean *swamp*.

In his novels, Abdulla makes Bwana Msa an exceedingly black man, with his underling, Najum, as a mixed-race character; there is no mistaking the subtle ways that he links the islands to the mainland or speaks with pride of place about Zanzibar as a part of the Swahili coast of Africa. He does so while differentiating Zanzibari culture from colonialist portraits of it and from Arab-Islamic visions. In *Mwana wa Yungi Hulewa* [*The Daughter of the Devil is Raised/Usually Drunk*], Abdulla has Bwana Msa differentiating himself from Sherlock Holmes, Arthur Conan Doyle's

fictional British private detective, noting to his loyal sidekick Najum that Msa never works for hire, and that Msa is really a researcher:

the difference between research and espionage is this: that to research is to look with concentration together with attention and listening in order to get to the totality of matters, even so that you are able to say that this was like that for such and such a reason. And spying is to peddle, monger and smear a thing in order to pick at it.⁵³

Even if Abdullah's novels can relate well with the planetary genre of detective fiction, they are also Swahili stories of a Swahili world. In *Kisima cha Giningi* [*Giningi Well*], a parable about the Swahili spirit world of Zanzibar, called Giningi, and the well locals in the story claimed was the portal to it, Abdulla describes another imaginary place in Zanzibar, a tower with a light

that had been lit, without being extinguished, from the ancient days until the recent era when Western education filled the world. . . . And there was a man called Mr. Light – who was a scholar of lights – who made great efforts to research how the light was able to stay eternally lit without going out or without needing oil or kerosene. But his research destroyed things, meaning while he investigated the light went out and it has not agreed to be lit again until today. All of his efforts and those of the others he sent for from Europe to help him didn't do a thing; the light refused, it just refused.⁵⁴

This light, like Abdullah's stories, or the underworld of Giningi, had emerged out of the Swahili indigenous world, not that of European science and education.

That was also an indigenous world that did not belong to the Arabs. In his last and longest novel, *Kosa la Bwana Msa* [*Bwana Msa's Mistake*], Abdulla scripts a conversation between a young Zanzibari woman, Mwanatenga, and an older Zanzibari man, Aziz, during his return visit after years living in the Gulf. Mwanatenga asks Aziz to choose which place is better, Unguja or Dubai. Aziz claims it is Dubai, without hesitation:

Unguja still has tin shacks. The buildings of Dubai are very tall. Your building here doesn't even reach the knees of a building in Dubai. Dubai has buildings that are 13 stories tall. . . . I live high up and look down; you would see people like ants.

Mwanatenga is unimpressed:

Well, if it is like that . . . you go live in your Dubai, leave us our Unguja, we still see it as a whole and we value it, and will not trade it for Dubai even if it has the buildings of America.⁵⁵

Throughout his writings, Abdulla voices a rooted respect for indigenous ways of being in Zanzibar, “as a whole,” without falling prey to “nativism as a private refuge,” the “blind alley” of either African or Arab nationalist thinking, or the aping of colonialist visions. There is a sense in his writings of the local identity that is “not exhaustive,” and an effort to re-think the Zanzibari experience “in non-imperialist terms,” as Said

would have it. To wit, it is Aziz's chauvinism about Dubai that Abdulla mocks in *Kosa la Bwana Msa*; Mwanatenga, with whom he clearly sympathizes, appreciates Dubai, and even America, but feels at home in the tin-shack planetary indigeneity of her cosmopolitan Unguja. Of course, much has happened to Zanzibari culture in the three decades since Abdulla's publications that might make it problematic to imagine his writings as the basis of a contemporary Zanzibari version of planetary indigeneity. But the terrain on which he held firm remains the third way of Zanzibari culture, beholden neither to colonialist nor to "blind alley" nationalist visions, and beneath the veneer of contentious politics over Zanzibari sovereignty and the Tanzanian union this way endures in the everyday cultural geographic processes of Zanzibaris.

POLITICAL DISCOURSES OF GEOGRAPHIES OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING IN POSTCOLONIAL ZANZIBAR

The three literary constructions of Zanzibar in relation to East Africa discussed above parallel the dramatically different and vibrantly alive contestation in daily regional geopolitics about Zanzibar. In this segment, I highlight these parallels, arguing for the vital importance of the often-hidden (and Swahili-language) everyday discursive tactics of ordinary, or a majority of, Zanzibari residents for any full understanding of the islands' identity politics, with a particular focus on place-naming practices. I see in these place-naming tactics intersections with a liberatory planetary indigeneity that is rooted in local experience and yet not confined to it, but instead, is strongly engaged with the world evolving all around it. I contend that similar nuances are vital to comprehending such politics across Sub-Saharan Africa in the twenty-first century, with similar possibilities for articulating this sort of planetary indigeneity.

One strong tendency in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Zanzibar has been toward the cultural-political linking of Zanzibar to the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian Gulf, and the Islamic World. The foreign minister of the first independent government before the 1964 revolution, Ali Muhsin al Barwani, exemplified this "Afrabian" discourse of Zanzibar and the Swahili coast in his sprawling memoir, increasing the proportion of Swahili words estimated to originate in Arabic from the standard linguistic estimation of 15–20%, to 45–55%, while claiming that "some put it at more than that."⁵⁶ He decried the transformation of written Swahili from Arabic to the Roman script under British colonialism as having "debased and emasculated Swahili."⁵⁷ He heaped praises upon Arabs for peacefully civilizing the coast, and on the role of Islam in furthering that enlightenment. He argued that from southern Somalia to the Comoro islands the Swahili people are "all mixtures of mixtures, predominantly Bantu and Arab."⁵⁸ But there is no doubt which part Barwani felt was more favored in the "mixtures of mixtures."

In actual practice, the everyday expression of cultural connectivity with the Arabian Peninsula or the province of Shiraz in Iran⁵⁹ has varied over time within postcolonial Zanzibar. Zanzibaris were restricted from acknowledging any Arab ancestry in the aftermath of the revolution given how many Arab-oriented Zanzibaris had been killed, exiled, or imprisoned. Even the label, Shirazi, for indigenous Zanzibaris – as in the name of the revolutionary Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), which ruled Zanzibar from 1964–1977 – faded from favor, virtually disappearing with the 1977 dissolution

of the ASP into the Revolutionary Party (Chama cha Mapinduzi, or CCM) that has ruled both segments of Tanzania since 1977.

With the opening up of Zanzibar's economy and political system in the late 1980s, ties with Arabia subtly came back into the open. This was most notable in the 1980s and 1990s, not in international relations, but in circulating wedding videos, when Zanzibaris in the Gulf, Oman, or the Middle East would send cassettes of their Swahili wedding ceremonies home to family in Zanzibar. Money, household goods and building materials came home from Arabia-based Zanzibaris working as teachers, soccer players, policemen, or engineers in Arabia. What Julia Verne calls the "living translocality" of Swahili people has expanded geographically and extended into new technologies in the twenty-first century, perhaps especially so for Zanzibari Swahili peoples, often inextricable from the "objects" that people trade or send to relatives.⁶⁰ This sort of connectivity is not confined to Oman and the Gulf, or even to the UK or northern Europe, though. Zanzibar's diaspora extends, with its everyday connections, across the Americas and Asia, into Australia, and to other parts of Africa. The African identity of Zanzibari and Swahili peoples has not eroded with the reemergence of claims for Arabness; solidarity with Islamic peoples across Asia, Africa, and Europe has strengthened, but so has, for many Zanzibaris, solidarity with other peoples of Africa. The diasporic reach of indigenous Zanzibar is truly planetary.⁶¹

The everyday discourses reproducing ties between Zanzibar and Africa are more subtle and complex than the tactics of revolutionary political elites. We can see this clearly in post-revolutionary Zanzibar's place-names. Toponymy (the study of place-names) can highlight everyday discursive subtlety as it compares with the decidedly unsubtle African revolutionaries. As Zanzibar city has grown and new neighborhoods have been formed in the postcolonial (revolutionary) era, naming practices delineate both official discourse and hidden cultural geographical dynamics. Official place-names in postcolonial neighborhoods make plain the Zanzibari revolutionary regime's political leanings and its place in the United Republic. Formally semi-planned neighborhoods formed from the 1960s–1980s include Nyerere, Muungano [the Union], Angola [a revolutionary ally], Msumbiji [Mozambique, another revolutionary ally], Urusi [Russia], or Amani [Peace, the name of first revolutionary President Abeid Amani Karume's son, who also served as Zanzibar's President from 2000–2010], alongside Mao Tse Tung Sports Stadium and V.I. Lenin Hospital. By contrast, names deployed informally in everyday discourse suggest much different political and cultural geographies for the new neighborhoods: Baghdad, Gaza Strip, Uholanzi [Holland, a frequently flooded zone], or Daraja Bovu [Broken Bridge] are all in hotly contested lands along the city edge that have developed unlawfully. These are indigenous names, but with obvious planetary resonance.

The more significant toponymic story lies in ordinary Zanzibari neighborhood names. For example, many neighborhood names have a tree in them. The plentiful array of trees represented in the city's indigenous names for neighborhoods surely betray a great significance for trees in the local urban culture as it developed. Mango, Baobab, Jackfruit, Banana, Kapok, Neem, Rambutan, Saman, Tamarind – tree after tree is a part or all of one-quarter of all neighborhood names.

Cosmopolitan and planetary in every sense though it may be, Zanzibar remains overwhelmingly an indigenous city; it predates the colonial period by 200 years as a city; it predates the Omani Sultanate by four centuries as a settlement. In most places,

one looks in vain for Arab or English place-name references. The tiny neighborhood known as Mitiulaya [European Trees] designates a stately *allee* along both sides of the small street at the neighborhood's center; although the trees were planted during the British colonial period, the trees are South American. Besides these "European Trees," there are very rare references in neighborhood names to Omani or Indian landowners – Kijambia [the Omani ceremonial knife] or Kwaalinatoo [Land of Ali Nathoo] – but the long dominance of Swahili communities is very evident in the place-names.

Zanzibar is in a (dry) tropical forest biome, with a full assortment of trees. When we look inside Zanzibari neighborhood tree names a little, though, what we see is the everyday life of working class urban communities, and the *planetary indigeneity* of their trees. Nearly every tree named in a Zanzibar neighborhood is an exotic species, one brought either by the British or by other traders over the centuries. Many of these – palms or mangoes, especially – have grown in such abundance, with many species and sub-species present in the isles for many years, though, that most urbanites would have found these trees upon their arrival even in the eighteenth or nineteenth century CE. Zanzibaris made exotic trees from all over the planet into indigenous trees.

Ten Zanzibari neighborhood names have mango trees in them. Mango trees grow tall and broad, providing extensive shade; they thus become focal points for cultural and economic activity. Mango trees [Mwembe, plural Miembe] that had shade areas for sail-mending (Mwembe-tanga), advice-giving (Mwembe-shauri), coir-rope-making (Mwembe-makumbi), and small-scale sales of groundnuts (Mwembe-njugu), fish (Kiembe-samaki), or sweets (Mwembe-ladu), appear in neighborhood names. Most other trees named in neighborhood toponymy are likewise large shade trees (kapok, baobab, jackfruit), or medium-height shade trees (neem), where people would gather.⁶² This socio-natural co-production also points to something else: the prominence of indigenous cultural-historical narratives in neighborhood naming.

This memorialization of the everyday shines through in many Zanzibari names. There are the occasionally sharp commentaries enmeshed in some names. But there is also a Piece of a Road Ballast [Baraste Kipande], Lucky Coconut Pudding [Bumbwisudi], a Place to be Carried [Chukwani], a Place for Moonshine Liquor [Gongoni], or a place to play Hide and Go Seek [Kajificheni].⁶³ Places of work and community activity are frequently named for the work or activity: Sokomuhogo [Cassava Market], Gulioni [At the Market], Karakana [Workshop], Kama [Milking], Mazizini [At the Cattle Pens], or Fuoni [At the Clothes-washing Place]. Thus the place-names enact the everyday socio-nature of the people, and in ways that are suggestive of local perspectives on nature, politics, and cultural practice. These perspectives suggest the rooted, yet planetary sense of place that Zanzibaris construct on a daily basis, in defiance of or disinterest toward both colonialist and nationalist discourses of cultural geography.

CONCLUSION

The postcolonial world is in flux in the second decade of the twenty-first century. That the "rhythmic qualities of places" now have "diverse vectors of interpretation" almost goes without saying.⁶⁴ It is increasingly challenging to buttress against the enduring postcolonial hangovers of ethnic nationalism, shifting neo-imperialist agendas,

and the rise of religious extremism. Zanzibar is a fine setting for unpacking post-colonial cultural-political struggles over identity, belonging, and space, as it is for an appreciation of the difficult task of reconstructing the postcolonial world in genuinely liberatory ways. Contestation over its national culture and bearing in relation to Tanganyika has similarities with struggles across Africa since independence, whether in geopolitical contests over territory or unending challenges to cultural and political unity in many other countries, at some level. Postcolonial cultural geography has begun to debate the potential of various conceptual pathways for extending the vitality of postcolonial studies. I have examined one of these here, which Sidaway, Woon, and Jacobs term “planetary indigeneity.” This is a pathway that is largely in tune with a similar (re)turn to valorizing local knowledge across African studies in the humanities and social sciences.

I have sought to show, using the Zanzibar example, that, deployed carefully, forms of “planetary indigeneity” might help produce cultural work which can combat both imperialist and nationalist blind alleys. This can only happen, though, with the avoidance of what Fanon termed “nativism” as false consciousness, or narrow-minded parochial bigotry. Using Said’s reading of Fanon to open up more “generous and pluralistic”⁶⁵ senses of local knowledge, I examined both works by the late Swahili novelist Muhamed Said Abdulla and everyday place-naming practices of Zanzibaris as potential bases for conceiving of a Zanzibari planetary indigeneity. Similar approaches to elucidating pathways to planetary indigeneity from the everyday performances of lived space or indigenous popular literature, rather than via rhetorical warfare over ethnicity and nationalism, could potentially have utility across Africa, and across the postcolonial world.

ENDNOTES

1. Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire Into the World Economy, 1770–1873* (London: James Currey, 1987).
2. Ali Muhsin al-Barwani, *Conflicts and Harmony in Zanzibar (Memoirs)* (Dubai, UAE: Privately Published, 1997), 126: cites the common nineteenth century phrase, “when one pipes on Zanzibar, they dance at the lakes.”
3. Issa Shivji, *Pan-Africanism or Pragmatism? Lessons of the Tanganyika-Zanzibar Union* (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2008), 68.
4. James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
5. Mainly: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (London: James Currey, 1993); Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Desertion* (New York: Pantheon, 2005); and Muhamed S. Abdulla, “Ufafanuzi wa ‘shamba’” [“The Definition of ‘Shamba’”]. In *Uandishi wa Tanzania, Kitabu cha Kwanza – Insha* [Tanzanian Writing, Book One – Essays], ed. J. Mbonde (Nairobi: East African Literature Board, 1976), 35–42.
6. James Sidaway, Chih Yuan Woon, and Jane Jacobs, “Planetary Postcolonialism.” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 35 (2014): 4.
7. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 230.
8. Sidaway et al., “Planetary”; Said, *Culture*; Adebayo Olukoshi and Francis Nyamnjoh, “The Postcolonial Turn: An Introduction.” In *The Post-Colonial Turn: Re-Imagining Anthropology and Africa*, ed. Rene Devisch and Francis Nyamnjoh (Bemenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research Group, 2012), 1–27; Ato Quayson, *Oxford Street, Accra: City Life*

- and the *Itineraries of Transnationalism* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2014); and Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press 1968 [Orig. 1961]).
9. Sidaway et al., “Planetary,” 5.
 10. *Ibid.*, 4.
 11. *Ibid.*, 10.
 12. Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 72.
 13. *Ibid.*, 101.
 14. *Ibid.*, 10.
 15. Sidaway et al., “Planetary,” 11.
 16. Jennifer Robinson, “Postcolonializing Geography: Tactics and Pitfalls.” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 24 (2003): 280.
 17. Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho, eds., *Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities Through African Perspectives* (Accra, Ghana: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2012).
 18. Olukoshi and Nyamnjoh, “The Postcolonial Turn,” 5.
 19. Munyaradzi Mawere, *Culture, Indigenous Knowledge and Development in Africa: Reviving Interconnections for Sustainable Development* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Langa Research & Publishing Common Initiative Group, 2014); Munyaradzi Mawere, *Environmental Conservation through Ubuntu and Other Emerging Perspectives* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Langa Research & Publishing Common Initiative Group, 2014).
 20. Brigit Obrist, “Introduction.” In *Living the City in Africa: Processes of Invention and Intervention*, ed. Brigit Obrist, Veit Arlt, and Elisio Macamo (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2013), 11.
 21. Quayson, *Oxford Street, Accra*, 30. See also: Ingrid Brudvig, *Conviviality in Bellville: An Ethnography of Space, Place, Mobility and Being in Urban South Africa* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Langa Research and Publishing, 2014), 9. William Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power in Zanzibar* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 334, champions the “unpredictable arts of the everyday.”
 22. Ignasio Jimu, *Peri-Urban Land Transactions: Everyday Practices and Relations in Peri-Urban Blantyre, Malawi* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Langa Research and Publishing, 2012), 42.
 23. Brittany Gilmer, *Political Geographies of Piracy: Constructing Threats and Containing Bodies in Somalia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
 24. Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, 6–7.
 25. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 213.
 26. *Ibid.*
 27. Said, *Culture*, 274–275.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. *Ibid.*
 30. *Ibid.*
 31. Ngũgĩ, *Moving*, 161.
 32. *Ibid.*
 33. *Ibid.*
 34. Cited in Shivji, *Pan-Africanism*, 76.
 35. Garth Myers and Makame Muhajir, “‘Wiped from the Map of the World’? Zanzibar, Critical Geopolitics and Language.” *Geopolitics* 18 (2013): 663–681.
 36. Gurnah, *Desertion*, 148.
 37. *Ibid.*
 38. *Ibid.*
 39. *Ibid.*
 40. Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Admiring Silence* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 66–67.
 41. Garth Myers, “Narrative Representations of Revolutionary Zanzibar.” *Journal of Historical Geography* 26 (2000): 429–448.

42. Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 282.
43. Omar R. Mapuri, *Zanzibar, the 1964 Revolution: Achievements and Prospects* (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Tema Publishers, 1996), 1.
44. Barwani, *Conflicts and Harmony*.
45. Garth Myers, "Isle of Cloves, Sea of Discourses: Writing About Zanzibar." *Ecumene* 3 (1996): 408–426.
46. Sidaway, et al., "Planetary."
47. Abdulla, "Ufafanuzi wa 'shamba'," 36; for this and all other quotations: my translation from the Kiswahili.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Muhamed S. Abdulla, "Bwawani Hotel: Utukufu wa Funguni" ["The Bwawani Hotel: The Glory of Funguni"]. In *Uandishi wa Tanzania, Kitabu cha Kwanza – Insha* [Tanzanian Writing, Book One – Essays], ed. J. Mbonde (Nairobi: East African Literature Board, 1976), 77.
52. Ibid.
53. Muhamed S. Abdulla, *Mwana wa Yungi Hulewa* [The Child of the Devil is Raised/Usually Drunk] (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1976), 7; even the title has a double entendre, since "hulewa" can be "is raised" or "is usually drunk."
54. Muhamed S. Abdulla, *Kisima cha Giningi* [Giningi Well] (Nairobi: Evans Brothers, 1968), 66.
55. Muhamed S. Abdulla, *Kosa la Bwana MSA* [Bwana MSA's Mistake] (Nairobi: Africana Publishers, 1984), 68.
56. Barwani, *Conflicts and Harmony*, 28.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Shiraz is claimed as the ancestral homeland of some Swahili coastal elites, as thoughtfully discussed by Abdul Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce and Islam* (London: Hurst, 2010), 163–166.
60. Julia Verne, *Living Translocality: Space, Culture and Economy in Contemporary Swahili Trade* (Stuttgart, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012).
61. One may hear recordings of Tumbatu island throat-singing of Islamic praise songs, for example, in Zanzibari homes in Seattle, Sweden, or Sendai.
62. Garth Myers, "Naming and Placing the Other: Power and the Urban Landscape in Zanzibar." In *Critical Toponymies: The Contested Politics of Place Naming*, ed. L. Berg and J. Vuolteenaho (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 85–100.
63. Ibid.
64. Quayson, *Oxford Street*, 30.
65. Said, *Culture*, 230.

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- . "Bwawani Hotel: Utukufu wa Funguni" ["The Bwawani Hotel: The Glory of Funguni"]. In J. Mbonde, ed. *Uandishi wa Tanzania, kitabu cha kwanza – insha* [Tanzanian writing, book one – essays] Nairobi: East African Literature Board, 1976b, 77–81.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

TRANSCOLONIAL CARTOGRAPHIES

Kateb Yacine and Mohamed Rouabhi
stage Palestine in France-Algeria



Olivia C. Harrison

THE PROBLEM WITH (LITERARY) MAPS

In the past decade there has been an effervescence of scholarly writings on French-language literary and theoretical production from France's former colonies in the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia, resulting in the emergence of a relatively new subfield, Francophone postcolonial studies.¹ The terms that are collapsed in this expression, Francophone studies and postcolonial studies, are not new of course. The first is an extension of French studies (primarily literary studies, although the field is increasingly interdisciplinary) on a global scale to include all French-speaking areas of the world (most, but not all, were part of France's colonial empire at some point). The second crystallized as an interdisciplinary field in the U.S. and U.K. in the 1980s, and examines cultural production through the lens of colonial history as it is played out in specific geo-political arenas of interaction and conflict. What is new, and salutary, about postcolonial Francophone studies is the historical lens adopted to examine works written in French by France's colonial subjects and their descendants. Applying a postcolonial lens to Francophone studies politicizes a field that was heretofore naturalized as French-speaking, and thereby consigned to orbit the center of the French empire: France. At the same time, however, the conjunction of the terms postcolonial and Francophone also reveals limits inherent to both terms, limits that pertain to the ways in which we map the boundaries of fields of humanistic inquiry. I will explore the limits of these literary cartographies in this essay by comparing two plays that fall through the cracks of the postcolonial and the Francophone: the Algerian writer Kateb Yacine's dialect comedy *Mohamed arfad valiztek* (*Mohamed pack your bags*) and the French playwright Mohamed Rouabhi's unpublished tragedy *El menfi/L'exilé* (*The exile*).²

Neither of these plays is "Francophone" in the usual sense. Kateb's play was performed in Algerian Arabic and Taqbaylith or Kabyle, a Tamazight ("Berber") language. Rouabhi is a French-born French citizen whose Algerian parents were subjects of the French empire before migrating to France. *El menfi/L'exilé* is therefore a French play, albeit relegated to the problematic category of *Beur/banlieue* literature: literature produced by the descendants of (post)colonial migrants (most often

from North Africa, though the expression more commonly used today, *littérature de banlieue*, simply refers to literature produced in the disenfranchised suburbs of France). Certainly both plays can and should be considered postcolonial in ways I will detail below. The fraught history of French colonialism in Algeria and French racism toward Maghrebi migrants provides the main narrative strand and object of critique in both plays. Yet *Mohamed arfad valiztek* and *El menfi/L'exilé* also exceed the colonizer–colonized framework in ways that push the category of the postcolonial to its limit. Specifically, Kateb and Rouabhi stage Palestine in their plays in order to destabilize the neat demarcation between colonial and postcolonial eras, and between the former colony and the metropole. Rather than confining the drama of postcolonial migration to France-Algeria alone, these plays stage what I am calling *transcolonial identification* with Palestine: transnational forms of solidarity that are based on an understanding of Palestine and Algeria as part of a long and unfinished colonial history. The double unraveling of the categories *Francophone* and *postcolonial* that obtains from a transcolonial reading of these plays, I argue, allows for a salutary reassessment of the field of postcolonial studies beyond the usual colonizer–colonized, periphery–center binary framework that still dominates the field. In other words, the transcolonial cartography sketched in these plays lies in excess of any given mapping of the literary world, including, most paradoxically and productively, the postcolonial one. I will map out the transcolonial cartography that obtains from this reading in the second part of this essay, after describing the limits and limitations of world, Francophone, and postcolonial literary cartographies.

Many of the theoretical treatises that have become classics of postcolonial studies were originally written in French by colonial subjects of France. Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, and Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* delivered scathing critiques of colonialism in the waning years of the French empire and, in Fanon's case, presciently described many of the challenges of the post-independence era. Along with later works by the likes of Edouard Glissant (*Poetics of Relation*) and Valentin-Yves Mudimbe (*The Invention of Africa*), these classic essays paved the way for postcolonial theory by deconstructing colonial epistemologies and diagnosing the colonized condition. Among the most important literary texts in the postcolonial canon, there is likewise a preponderance of works in French, many of them available in English translation, by the likes of Sembene Ousmane, Maryse Condé, Kateb Yacine, Assia Djebar, and Edmond Jabès, who experimented with the French language, literary forms and genres, and, in the case of Sembene and Djebar, film, to denounce colonial rule and fashion autonomous literary voices and cinematic visions. As the work of scholars such as Robert J. C. Young and Gary Wilder amply demonstrates, one cannot understand modern colonial history, the emergence of anticolonial resistance, and the development of postcolonial theory without studying French colonial history and the rich archive of French-language works written in response to it.³

And yet, until recently, very few of the aforementioned writers and intellectuals, so seminal to the field of postcolonial studies, were included in the French literary canon or in intellectual histories of France. Assigned to the more marginal category of “Francophone literature” (works written in French by non-French writers who are, for the most part, former colonial subjects of France from Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia) in French bookstores and university curricula alike, they were seen as

the exotic pupils of French luminaries such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. The latter's Algerianness (Camus was a *pied noir*, or settler) was downplayed if not downright invisible, even when I discovered his work during the course of my French schooling in the 1990s (no other non-metropolitan writers were included in the curriculum). From the 1950s, when France's empire began to crumble, through the 1990s, the "black decade" in which tens of thousands of Algerians lost their lives in a conflict that spilled over the borders of the former colonial power, only anti-colonial activists and historians of colonialism, it seemed, took any interest in the trove of writings emerging from the former empire.⁴ With few exceptions, scholars who specialized in Francophone literature continued to apply narrow literary exegetical methodologies to a corpus of texts that seemed completely disconnected from French and world histories.⁵ The France/Francophonie, center/periphery map that prevailed in academic and mainstream discourses divided the world into France and the rest, with France's former empire at a comfortable distance from metropolitan affairs.

A funny thing happened at the turn of the millennium: France discovered its post-colonial canon. Rather than naively celebrate the deconstruction of national borders and embrace a globalized French literature – this would happen a few years later, with the publication of the manifesto "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français" ("Toward a 'World Literature' in French") in 2007 – academic discourse around postcolonial Francophone literature initially struck a somewhat defensive note, demarcating itself from an Anglo-centered field too closely aligned with Commonwealth literature. Two books published in 1999, Pascale Casanova's widely read (and translated) *World Republic of Letters* and Jean-Marc Moura's more modest *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale*, warned against the recuperation of the margins by the center, where the center was understood to comprise, in addition to France (the former colonial metropole), a decentralized, global English, hegemonic in terms of both linguistic and epistemic reach. For Moura, the "postcolonial perspective" preempted the homogenizing thrust of a dehistoricized Francophonie that preserved France as the epicenter of its subsidiary literatures, while eschewing the trap of a new, Anglocentric universalism.⁶ This revised literary map of the former French empire was explicitly modeled on Anglophone postcolonial studies, even as it sought to act as a foil to it. Thus, rather than embrace "an obsolete Gallicism"⁷ against the threat of the "planetary cultural uniformity" imposed by the "Anglophone expansion,"⁸ Moura prescribed a new Francophonie, which, through the filter of postcolonial theory, could become "one of the great linguistic communities of a pluricultural twenty-first century."⁹ Refusing to throw out the postcolonial baby with the bath water of hegemonic English, he proposed a French-language postcolonial theory that would both revitalize the discipline of French and Francophone literature and enrich the field of postcolonial studies. Casanova's even more ambitious project, pitched against the national/linguistic division of world literatures according to competing (European) empires of influence, was less explicitly aimed at the encroachment of global English. For, unlike Moura, Casanova situated Paris as the literary capital of the world republic of letters, a Greenwich Meridian that, according to her, had determined the literary value of works for centuries and would continue to do so for years to come. Against this centripetal literary cartography, she proposed to "describe the hierarchical structure of the literary world" in order to shed light on its provinces.¹⁰ Expanding postcolonial

theory's preoccupation with what Edward Said called "imperial culture" on a world scale,¹¹ Casanova placed the postcolonial Francophone writer Kateb Yacine alongside James Joyce, William Faulkner, and E. M. Cioran, within a global, minoritized literary tradition.

In different ways, Moura and especially Casanova provide a salutary corrective to the dominance of English in the marketplace of ideas, a dominance that extends to academic discourse, perhaps most saliently to inherently transnational fields such as postcolonial studies. By virtue of its Anglo-American genesis, this field has tended to gravitate toward the English language, whether in its focus on texts written or translated into English or in terms of critical output. Most postcolonial scholars read Memmi and Fanon in translation, and English-language literature from the Indian subcontinent to Anglophone Africa remains the most well represented in the field, from Chinua Achebe to Salman Rushdie. Postcolonial theory is, furthermore, predominantly written in the English language, and this despite the proliferation of postcolonial studies in non-Anglophone countries, where scholars are nevertheless increasingly encouraged to publish in English. Although I am sympathetic to attempts to "provincialize" the fields of postcolonial and Francophone studies, to borrow Dipesh Chakrabarty's felicitous expression,¹² Moura's and, despite the decentering thrust of her work, Casanova's reappropriation of postcolonial theory and world literature for France begs the question of the continued hegemony of French mappings of the literary, on a par with the much more visible global hegemony of the English language. If it is true that postcolonial studies are overdue for internationalization or, to use a more current terminology, transculturation, Francophone studies, as the field is still known in France and in French departments in the U.S., is not off the hook simply by virtue of belonging to a now minor (because non-Anglophone) tradition. The problem with initiatives such as the above-mentioned manifesto "Toward a World Literature in French," which, among other things, celebrates the increasingly global reach of French and Francophone literature, is that they nevertheless redirect writings from the margins to the center of what remains the former French colonial empire.¹³ What the signatories fail to note is that the overwhelming majority of works written in French are published in Paris (and sometimes in provincial cities of France) rather than in the capitals of the "Francophone" world, obscuring rather than throwing light on other centers of literary production. The dominant, and ostensibly global map of French world literature remains firmly centered in Europe.

The problem with these diverse attempts to "world" French literature, even those that, like Moura's, adopt the postcolonial as a framework, is that they necessarily position France as the origin and epicenter of a French-language corpus, artificially isolating this corpus from the literary traditions that coexist and compete with the French one. On an obvious level, "world literature in French" excludes writings in other languages, including the many languages used in France's former colonies: Arabic, Berber, Vietnamese, and dozens if not hundreds of African languages. Initiatives such as that of the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who writes in both English and Gikuyu and is an outspoken advocate for writing and translating into African languages, simply fall by the wayside of literary cartographies dominated by European languages.¹⁴ An even more problematic consequence of mono-linguistic projects such as "world literature in French" and Anglo-centered postcolonial studies is that

they retain and, I would argue, naturalize the (ex)colonizer–colonized dialectic of the colonial world order. This is most evident in the French case, where language, as well as cultural and political norms (*laïcité* or secularism and other staples of French Jacobinism), were imposed through coercive legal measures in conjunction with education, assimilation, and other propagandistic methods. In the cultural realm, the most visible and persistent results of French colonial assimilation policies are Francophonie (in the demographic sense of the community of French-speakers originating from countries other than France, still predominantly countries formerly colonized by France) and the metropolitan publication and dissemination of works written in French. To borrow Casanova's metaphor, Paris remains the capital of French letters in the twenty-first century. Despite the recent effervescence of independent presses in countries like Morocco, it is not an exaggeration to say that the publishing sectors in France's former colonies, not to mention these countries' potential reading publics, remain atrophied, with the result that Maghrebi writers are more likely to publish in Paris, Cairo, or Beirut than in their native countries. Though Moura and Casanova provide important counterpoints to Eurocentric literary histories, there is a sense in which their appeals to a worldly and/or postcolonial perspective still re-center France on the map of world literature.

There are obvious political risks in reifying a colonial world order into a postcolonial one. Celebratory accounts such as "Toward a World Literature in French" mask the violent political history by which the French language achieved such global reach, placing the Québécois writer Réjean Ducharme and the Swiss travel writer Nicolas Bouvier alongside Aimé Césaire and other nameless "writers from the Antilles, Haiti, Africa" whose relationship to the French language is altogether more embattled than the authors of the manifesto imply.¹⁵ More insidiously, even Moura's and Casanova's analyses of postcolonial and world literature, which, unlike the manifesto, historicize the global literary map and expose the power differentials that govern it, end up reinforcing the idea that non-metropolitan writers must publish in Paris or perish. Though they are clearly critical of the empire of letters (Casanova's title, *The World Republic of Letters*, is both ironic and aspirational), what they describe is a post-/neo-colonial literary cartography adapted to twenty-first century global markets. Though anti-hegemonic in intent, Casanova's and Moura's alternative maps of world and Francophone literature nevertheless depend upon the center/periphery, North/South hierarchies they are meant to undo, rewriting the imperial world order for the purportedly postcolonial present. How might we rethink our world literary map beyond the colonizer–colonized paradigm that continues to govern the field of postcolonial studies?

There is no doubt that the world-literary system is an unequal one. And yet, despite the persistence of hegemonic relations between metropole and former colony, the North is no longer the fulcrum point of writings from the South, whether these are written in the colonial tongue or in other languages. Nor has it been the sole interlocutor in the past. To the contrary, the world literary map has always been a centrifugal and multidirectional one, even at the heyday of anticolonialism. Taking Moura's and Casanova's decentering critiques one step further, I contend that centripetal notions of Francophonie, world literature, and Anglocentric postcolonial studies mask what Françoise Lionnet and Shu Mei Shih call the *transcolonial*: the myriad transversal relations that connect one end of empire to another and indeed any of several points

on the map of the Global South within or across former colonial empires.¹⁶ Crucially, the transcolonial does not do away with the postcolonial, as if one could simply ignore the far-reaching legacies of European colonialism in the present. On the contrary, as I will show in my reading of Kateb's and Rouabhi's Palestine plays below, attention to cultural and political alliances and exchanges across the (formerly) colonized world throws new light on the modalities and contours of the (post)colonial condition. But the transcolonial map that obtains when we take into account horizontal or South–South vectors of communication no longer privileges a vertical and necessarily hierarchical North–South axis. Rather, it decolonizes imperial mappings of cultural power and literary influence by charting transcolonial political imaginaries, imaginaries that do not fit neatly into the (post)colonial world order governed by colonizer–colonized relations.

TOWARD A TRANSCOLONIAL MAP, OR WHAT DOES PALESTINE HAVE TO DO WITH FRANCE-ALGERIA?

The region spanning North Africa and Southwest Asia, known, in Arabic, as *al-maghrib* and *al-mashriq*, lends itself particularly well to transcolonial analysis, given the overlapping maps of Ottoman, British, and French colonial rule in the region. As evidenced in the multilingual and transnational slogans that echoed from Tunisia to Egypt and Syria in 2011 – *kuluna tunisiyun* (“we are all Tunisian,” one of the hymns of Tahrir Square), *dégage/irhal* (“leave” in French and Arabic) – political imaginaries in the region cross the geographical, linguistic, national, and ethnic lines drawn by France and Britain in the early twentieth century, lines that have been reified in the U.S.-based Cold War-era area studies model now ubiquitous in academic and political discourse. Nor are such transnational political imaginaries a new phenomenon. Contrary to the long-standing view of North Africa and the Middle East as discrete and disconnected geographical regions somehow still tethered to their former colonial powers, Maghrebi writers and intellectuals have looked to the Mashriq – and in particular, Palestine – for decades in elaborating postcolonial literary forms and idioms.

In my first book, I argue that Palestine has become the figure par excellence of the colonial condition, writ large to include past and present, foreign and domestic forms of political oppression and cultural imperialism.¹⁷ I show that writers as diverse as Kateb Yacine, Ahlam Mosteghanemi, Abdellatif Laâbi, Abdelkebir Khatibi, and Edmond Amran El Maleh have turned to Palestine in order to reinvestigate *the colonial*, redefined to include continuing forms of direct colonial rule, most vividly captured in Israeli rule over Palestinians, as well as the persistence of French control over the Maghreb's economic and cultural means of production, and the oppressive tactics of the postcolonial state. It is important to reiterate that my focus on transcolonial relations across the formerly and still colonized world does not entail that the postcolonial is passé, or that decolonization is a finished process. On the contrary, I show that Maghrebi representations of Palestine reveal enduring questions about the legacies of colonialism in the Maghreb and changing forms of “colonial” rule in the present, expanded to include not only Israeli and U.S. imperialism, but also the iron fist of authoritarian postcolonial regimes deploying military and legal means inherited from colonial powers, and France's treatment of its (post)colonial

migrants, including the French citizens that continue to be dubbed “Arabs/Muslims” in public discourse. Thus, if the former metropole is no longer the sole interlocutor of the Maghreb in a triangulated map of the Mediterranean, France nevertheless remains an important figure in this revised cartography of Maghrebi literature and intellectual history. More fundamentally, the divide and rule policies deployed in the Maghreb to separate Jews and Muslims consolidated and dovetailed with what Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin identifies as the Zionist/Israeli “principle of separation.”¹⁸ Other haunting parallels between French colonial and Israeli rule include the legal distinction between citizens and subjects (translated as the national/citizen divide between Jews and others in Israel) and aggressive acculturation policies. Adopting a horizontal, transcolonial approach to the Maghreb and Israel-Palestine illuminates these parallels without collapsing one colonial situation onto another. It also replaces a North-South (post)colonial map with a multipolar and multidirectional Mediterranean cartography, one that is better suited, I argue, to the transnational affiliations of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in the South as well as in the North. Indeed the story I have just told about transcolonial identification with Palestine in the Maghreb extends across the sea to the metropole, where the two plays I turn to now were first staged and debated.

I focus in the remainder of this essay on two French-Algerian plays that lend Palestine a central role in the drama of (post)colonial immigration, revealing the porousness of the borders separating the colonial and the postcolonial, the Maghreb and the Mashriq, and the southern and northern shores of the Mediterranean. *Mohamed arfad valiztek*, by the dissident Algerian writer Kateb Yacine, toured throughout France and Algeria in the 1970s and 1980s, while Mohamed Rouabhi’s *El menfi/L’exilé* was staged in Occupied Ramallah and the French *banlieue* (low income residential areas in the periphery of major French cities) at the turn of the millennium. Like all of Kateb’s dialect plays (of which it was the first and most popular), *Mohamed arfad valiztek* assembles a series of comic sketches pitting underdog against master in a farcical tableau of colonial and postcolonial oppression. But unlike Kateb’s other plays, *Mohamed arfad valiztek* frames the trials and tribulations of its eponymous protagonists within a double portrait of the colonization of Palestine and Algeria, drawing a parallel between Algerian migrant workers and Palestinian refugees. Rouabhi’s *El menfi/L’exilé*, on the other hand, tackles the theme of migration in the tragic mode, painting a pessimistic portrait of migrant life in France. But like Kateb’s farce, it juxtaposes the quintessential figure of exile, the Palestinian refugee, to the multiple generations of postcolonial migrants in France, from undocumented workers (*sans-papiers*) to French *banlieue* youths. Though written in different contexts and for very different publics, these plays are exemplary of what I call transcolonial identification with Palestine: a political and imaginative investment in Palestine, understood as a central and iconic space in a colonial continuum that includes the Maghreb (especially Algeria) and postcolonial France. As I will show, the transcolonial map of the Mediterranean sketched in these plays expands the postcolonial and Francophone map of France-Algeria in a crossed critique of the colonial condition writ large.

Kateb and Rouabhi – it bears emphasizing at the outset – would not normally be the object of a comparative study. Best known as a French-language novelist, dramaturge, and poet who theorized writing in French as an act of guerrilla warfare,¹⁹ Kateb is undeniably a central figure in the canon of (Francophone) Algerian

literature. After independence, he turned his pen against the corrupt military state and founded a popular theater troupe that performed in the spoken languages of Algeria, Algerian Arabic and Tamazight. Rouabhi, for his part, was born in France to first-generation Algerian immigrants and grew up in the impoverished suburb of Drancy. His personal trajectory and the subject matter of his plays – the everyday lives of postcolonial migrants and their struggle for social justice – clearly situate him within *Beur/banlieue* literature, a subfield of French literature that groups together (and I would argue, further marginalizes) postcolonial French writers whose forebears were subjects of Greater France. The academic distinction between French (including *Beur/banlieue*) and (postcolonial) Francophone studies obfuscates an important link between Kateb's and Rouabhi's plays, one that is intimately connected, I argue, to Palestine as a metaphor of the colonial: their critique of the continued disenfranchisement of Algerian and other postcolonial migrants in France.

The parallel between Kateb's and Rouabhi's representations of the migrant condition is evident in their oblique evocation of an event that is foundational in the narrative of postcolonial migration: the killing of an estimated two hundred Algerian workers demonstrating against a racist curfew imposed by the Parisian police at the tail end of the Algerian war of independence. Known, metonymically, as October 17, 1961 (the date of the demonstration), this event connects colonial violence (the extra-judicial torture and killing of colonized subjects) to racially motivated police brutality in postcolonial France, and the Algerian war to postcolonial racism.²⁰ *El menfi/L'exilé* begins the story of (post)colonial migration to France with this event as a character named Nadia, the journalist who, as we will see, reports on the events that befall both the French and Palestinian characters later in the play, waits in vain for her father to come home. Kept off-stage and summoned through the memory of her dead father, October 17 provides the historical backdrop of the riots and other explosions of violence that punctuate the play until its climactic conclusion. October 17 similarly provides the dramatic pretext for Kateb's play, which was first performed to commemorate the ten-year anniversary of the massacre in Algeria.²¹ While no explicit mention of this event is made in *Mohamed arfad valiztek*, the play's parallel indictment of colonial violence in Algeria and police brutality and racist crimes in postcolonial France could not but summon the still fresh memory of the massacre amongst migrant communities where the play was staged in the early 1970s. October 17 represents, in both plays, a French-Algerian (post)colonial continuum, one that is not adequately accounted for in a French and Francophone or even "classic" postcolonial studies framework.

Etienne Balibar, Mireille Rosello, and Todd Shephard have productively interrogated the distinction between the colonial and the postcolonial in the French-Algerian context, focusing on the porous borders separating colonial violence in the metropole and its Algerian territories and the legal, administrative, political, and everyday discourses surrounding (post)colonial migration to France.²² In Balibar's provocative formulation, Algeria and France are not one nation (as in the colonial mantra "Algeria is France") but nor are they two, as the dominant narrative of decolonization – one based, in France, on the exclusion of the French-Algerian citizen-subject – suggests. To quote Balibar's "numerical [fractal] allegory": "Algeria and France, taken together, do not make two, but something like one and a half, as if each of them, in their addition, always already constituted a part of the other."²³ Paradoxically, this binational

mapping of former colonizer and colonized (“Farança-Algéries or Djazaïr-Frances,” in Rosello’s hyphenated formulation) resists the hegemonic impulse of a postcolonial map that too neatly follows the North/South hierarchy of the colonial world order. In this reading, France cannot simply “be rid” of Algeria.

I have found this “fractal” French-Algerian framework extremely productive in my study of Kateb’s and Rouabhi’s plays. As I will show, *Mohamed arfad valiztek* and *El menfi/L’exilé* both take aim at what elsewhere Rosello calls the metaphor of “post-colonial hospitality,” the ubiquitous and ahistorical representation of immigration as a mere byproduct of globalization, disconnected from colonial and postcolonial history. As Rosello succinctly puts it, “the immigrant as guest is a metaphor that has forgotten it is a metaphor.”²⁴ Kateb and Rouabhi both expose the colonial production of the figure of the guest worker, restoring the severed link between France and Algeria to anticolonial ends. Yet they also invite further transgression of postcolonial borders, complicating the binational framework (Algeria-France) with a third (post) colonial space: Palestine. Instead of framing their critique of postcolonial hospitality as a Franco-Algerian affair, Kateb and Rouabhi in turn “host” Palestine in their double portrait of postcolonial migration. As I will show, Palestine is integral to the plays’ critiques of “postcolonial hospitality” – the discursive erasure of the colonial history that produced the category of the (post)colonial migrant, including the exemplary figure of the Palestinian refugee, the victim of forcible boundary crossings.

Partly because of its didactic and farcical tone, *Mohamed arfad valiztek* makes clear the politics of transcolonial identification and helps elucidate the arguably more central, but also more elusive, place of Palestine in *El menfi/L’exilé*. Kateb’s play situates the story of Algerian migration to France within a much larger tableau of Western imperialism, including the French- and British-led partition of Palestine and its colonization by Zionist settlers, and the French-American wars against Vietnam. The play begins, *in medias res*, with a scene split between France/Algeria and Israel/Palestine: “Mohamed I and Mohamed II are working the land, one in Algeria, the other in Palestine.” Clearly figures of the colonized, the two Mohameds are interpellated by the settlers Ernest and Moshe, in French and Hebrew respectively: “Bonjour, Mohamed!”; “Shalom!”²⁵ The scene that follows is a pastiche of the colonial *différend* between native and settler,²⁶ as the two pairs head home for the night and find that, to their surprise, they are neighbors. Mohamed I and Ernest and Mohamed II and Moshe wake up to the sound of a rooster crowing. Each character proceeds to “offer” the bird to his “guest,” culminating in a naming contest that inadvertently produces a transcolonial comparison between France/Israel and Algeria/Palestine:

ERNEST, <i>to Mohamed I.</i>	I’d like to invite you . . .
MOSHE, <i>to Mohamed II.</i>	Do you like chicken?
MOHAMED I.	I was about to invite you.
ERNEST.	You’ll invite me
	When you’re in your own home.
MOHAMED I.	This is my home!
MOHAMED II.	This is my village.
MOSHE.	No, this is my home!
MOHAMED I.	Come on, you’re joking?

MOSHE.	I'm telling you, this is my home!
ERNEST.	What is the name of your village?
MOHAMED II.	Come on, you're mad!
	What is the name of your village?
MOHAMED I.	Algeria, and yours?
ERNEST.	France!
MOSHE.	Israel, and yours?
MOHAMED II.	Palestine!
MOHAMED I.	If only this rooster could speak . . .
ERNEST.	He'd say France!
MOSHE.	Israel!
MOHAMED I.	He'd say Algeria!
MOHAMED II.	He'd say Palestine!
ERNEST.	France!
MOSHE.	Israel!
MOHAMED I.	Algeria!
MOHAMED II.	Palestine! ²⁷

This comical rendition of colonialism as a scene of mistaken hospitality serves to introduce the theme of postcolonial hospitality, whereby the (post)colonial migrant is treated as a guest. Contra the alarmist, presentist discourse on immigration that was crystallizing in France in the early 1970s, *Mohamed arfad valiztek* historicizes immigration as the direct result of colonization. It also exposes the migrant condition as a process of dispossession similar to that of colonization. As Memmi and more recently Ranajit Guha have argued, colonial discourse is rooted in the naturalization of the colony as home – albeit an uncanny one that can never be fully appropriated, at least as long as the indigenous inhabitants are in sight.²⁸ The settler claims to be at home in the colony, turning the original inhabitants of the land into guests subject to the laws of hospitality. Extending the metaphor of hospitality to the postcolony, the metropole becomes the space in which the postcolonial host “welcomes” migrant workers and their French descendants. But if it is evident why Kateb frames the plight of the Algerian emigrant within a longer French colonial history, the significance of Palestine in this tableau is less clear. What does Palestine have to do with the story of France’s treatment of its Algerian subject/citizens? What is the place of Palestine in this fractal map of the Algerian (post)colony?

The arrival of a French and British general at the end of the opening scene of *Mohamed arfad valiztek* clarifies the historical links between Algeria and Palestine, sites that appear unconnected from an exclusively postcolonial vantage point. In a send-up of European-Zionist quarrels over Palestine, the French general Decoq (*coq* means “rooster” in French) claims that the rooster is a “Gaullish cock,” while Ernest, the British general Cock, and Moshe all claim the village (*douar*) as that of France, England, and Israel, respectively. Moshe, the Zionist settler, occupies the land thanks to the French and British partition of Ottoman-ruled Palestine at the end of World War I, declaring independence from England at the expense of indigenous Palestinians. Though Palestine disappears from the rest of the play, this trans-colonial comparison is, I argue, foundational to Kateb’s critique of colonial and postcolonial discourses of hospitality, implicitly connecting France’s treatment of its

(post)colonial subject-citizens in both Algeria and France to Israel's dispossession and disenfranchisement of the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine.

When Kateb and his troupe staged *Mohamed arfad valiztek* in France, Palestine was just beginning to take hold as a marker of the colonial amongst postcolonial communities living in the former metropole – that is, as a metaphor of the disenfranchisement of (post)colonial migrants. The Palestine committees that were formed in the aftermath of May '68 by the Maoist Gauche prolétarienne and Maghrebi workers and students were the first explicitly to connect the Palestinian question to minority rights in France.²⁹ This connection has only become more explicit in recent decades, particularly after the second *Intifada*, as evidenced in rap and hip-hop culture, literature, and the work of militant associations such as Les Indigènes de la République, who regularly organize pro-Palestinian demonstrations. Franco-Maghrebi support for Palestine was and is grounded in a perceived experience of colonization, an experience that extends across the Mediterranean to the lived reality of postcolonial migration to France. In the words of Rouabhi, commenting, in the preface to his first play about Palestine, on his father's experience of dispossession and his own marginalized position in France,

there is an obvious analogy between the historical destinies of Arab peoples who experienced occupation and colonization, a common search for identity, and this was my point of departure: a more or less conscious process, for an Arab living in France, to write a play taking place in Palestine.³⁰

Staged in 2000 and 2001 in Ramallah and its sister city in the Parisian *banlieue*, Épinay-sur-Seine, *El menfi/L'exilé* dramatizes even more explicitly the historical and structural links between (post)colonial migrants and their disenfranchised descendants in France and Palestine-Israel.

Like *Mohamed arfad valiztek*, *El menfi/L'exilé* frames the story of postcolonial migrants in France within the narrative of Palestinian dispossession. To a much greater extent than Kateb, Rouabhi crosses these two paths of exile within a transnational colonial and postcolonial map that connects Paris and its *banlieue* to Beirut, Palestine, and the U.S., and the fate of its Palestinian protagonist to that of French-Algerian postcolonial subjects. The play weaves together different stories of exile, whose protagonists include: John Walid Jaber, a Palestinian writer who was raised in the U.S., lost his eyesight in Beirut during the 1982 Israeli invasion, and is writing a memoir in France; his Palestinian stenographer and fiancée, Anissa; Nadia, the French-Algerian reporter whose father disappeared on October 17, 1961; Muhammad, freshly arrived from Algeria with Islamist fighting credentials; and Maghrebi and Palestinian *sans-papiers* or undocumented migrants. I focus in my very brief reading on the final scenes of the play, set in the *banlieue*. Unlike *Mohamed arfad valiztek*, *El menfi/L'exilé* withholds a simple one-to-one comparison between Palestinian refugees and postcolonial migrants to France, complicating a French-Algerian, (post)colonial genealogy of exile with an altogether messier story of transcolonial violence, one that summons the specter of the Algerian "black decade."

As if in counterpoint to the above-mentioned scene evoking the colonial violence of October 17, Rouabhi introduces a character, Muhammad, who serves as a reminder of intra-Algerian violence. Trained in the Algerian army and in Afghanistan

and rumored to be in France to “wage war” against the infidels, Muhammad ends up committing two misogynistic crimes instead.³¹ After raping a young *banlieue* woman, he murders Anissa, a woman he has never met, in cold blood. Anissa has just accepted John Walid Jaber’s marriage proposal after giving a public reading of his memoir, to great acclaim, making her demise all the more poignant. But what is particularly troubling about this ending is that her murderer is . . . Algerian. The irony of what we might call a transcolonial murder is thrown into sharp relief in the following scene, which reveals that, while Anissa was declaiming the words of the Palestinian refugee in a popular *banlieue* theater, an urban riot (*émeute*) was unfolding backstage, symbolically pegging Palestinian cultural resistance to an extreme manifestation of postcolonial disenfranchisement. In the penultimate scene of the play, immediately following Muhammad’s apparently gratuitous murder, the journalist Nadia appears on stage, “in the midst of youth . . . who throw rocks on policemen . . . wearing Palestinian scarves as masks.”³² Nadia delivers her reportage about the riot to the camera and concludes by speculating that the Palestinian woman killed that evening was the victim of a racist crime. Here dramatic irony – the spectator knows what really happened – serves to shore up the darker side of transcolonial identification, spinning this last image of a French-style *Intifada* in a particularly cruel light. In Rouabhi’s dystopian final tableau of postcolonial France, Palestine is not an object or an imagined space of transcolonial solidarity, though it serves as an exemplary figure of exile and loss throughout the play. Instead, one (post)colonial “guest” kills another against the backdrop of a race riot, as young men wearing the *kufiya*, the checkered headscarf traditionally worn by Palestinian men and ubiquitous symbol of Palestine, throw rocks on policemen, a gesture indelibly associated with the first *Intifada*. What is the significance of this apparently senseless murder in a play ostensibly about the shared plight of Palestinian refugees and postcolonial migrants in France?

Rouabhi’s use of a deranged character pretexting religious inspiration to commit crimes against Muslim women should give us pause – this character aligns a little too closely with the still prevalent Orientalist cliché of the Muslim male as fanatic oppressor of women. But the appearance of Muhammad also dramatically projects Algeria into France, and the colonial onto the postcolonial. In a somewhat simplistic way, Muhammad serves as a reminder of the perverse effects of colonialism in the present: the division of Algerian society into Europeanized elites (including, ironically, the corrupt ruling military class that took power during the anticolonial struggle) and the masses (including those that would be recruited in the armed Islamist struggle against the secular regime). An act that appears, at first glance, to foreclose transcolonial identification – a formerly colonized subject killing a still colonized one – doubly reinscribes the colonial via the memory of intra-Algerian violence.

TOWARD A TRANSCOLONIAL POLITICS?

It is tempting to read Rouabhi’s dystopian conclusion as a symptom of despair in a climate wherein Palestinian life has become precarious to a point unimaginable in Kateb’s lifetime. Kateb died shortly after the beginning of the first Palestinian *Intifada*, a popular uprising that, though brutally repressed, fueled hope for radical change. In contrast, Rouabhi wrote *El menfi/L’exilé* around the time of the second *Intifada*, well after the so-called Oslo Peace Process was exposed as a political charade, and

at the beginning of a decade (and more) of increasing colonization (settler colonies, the separation wall and Jewish-only roads, to name a few examples) and outright destruction (full-fledged military operations, but also the quotidian razing of homes, olive groves, chicken farms . . .). Paradoxically, though, French support for Palestine has only grown in the face of the gradual dismemberment of Palestine as a rapidly diminishing territory and viable political entity, as demonstrated in the very genesis of *El menfi/L'exilé*, written after a series of workshops animated by Rouabhi in the Occupied Territories. If Rouabhi's play foils the spectator's desire for transcolonial solidarity – the kind delivered in the opening scene of *Mohamed arfad valiztek* – it delivers a mordant transcolonial critique of the postcolonial condition, writ large to include the ever-worsening plight of colonized Palestinians and the continued disenfranchisement of successive generations of postcolonial migrants in France.

What, then, might be the politics of transcolonial cartography? On the one hand, I have argued that Kateb's and Rouabhi's Palestine plays make evident the blind spots of both Francophone and "classic" postcolonial studies. The former artificially singles out French-language literature from France's former colonial empire and implicitly relegates it to the margins of the empire of French letters, while the latter maintains North and South in a perpetual deadlock, despite rapidly shifting power relations and new anti-(neo)colonial alliances. Reading Maghrebi literature through the lens of transcolonial identification with Palestine reveals that the borders separating the Maghreb and Mashriq, as well as France and Israel, are more porous than they first appear. Kateb's and Rouabhi's vastly different French-Algerian plays about Palestine provide a glimpse of the kinds of multidirectional and polycentric affiliations revealed in transcolonial analysis, illuminating the (post)colonial condition in novel and productive ways, and gesturing toward a revised map of anti- and postcolonial literature.

But even more importantly, the transcolonial cartography I have sketched here reveals that Palestine has become a metaphor for the colonial in the purportedly postcolonial present, enabling a double critique of entrenched colonial discourses in the postcolony and of continued Israeli colonialism. More than any other colonial situation today, Palestine makes urgently felt the continued need for transnational anti-colonial activism, a need that has partly been met by movements such as the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaign that emerged in Palestinian civil society in 2005 and has since all but reached the U.S. mainstream, a formidable feat indeed. Simply put, the transcolonial re-actualizes anticolonial critique for our globalized, neoliberal age, offering a new politics of horizontal alliances across the colonial boundaries and territories of old.

ENDNOTES

1. Scholars such as Françoise Lionnet and Ronnie Scharfman were among the first to apply a postcolonial lens to the study of French-language texts from France's former colonies. Françoise Lionnet and Ronnie Scharfman, eds., "Post/Colonial Conditions: Exiles, Migrations, and Nomadisms." Vols. 1 and 2. Special issue of *Yale French Studies* 82 and 83 (1993). The foundation of the Nottingham-based Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies in 2002 and the recent flourishing of journal special issues, edited volumes, and specialized book series with related titles (e.g. Liverpool University Press' eponymous

- book series) attest to the coalescence of this field in the past decade. Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, eds., *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* (London: Arnold, 2003) and *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009); H. Adlai Murdoch and Anne Donadey, eds., *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).
2. Kateb Yacine, "Mohamed prends ta valise." In *Boucherie de l'espérance: Oeuvres théâtrales*, ed. Zebeida Chergui (Paris: Seuil, 1999), 205–370. Mohamed Rouabhi, *El menfi/ L'exilé*. I use the original Arabic title of Kateb's play even though the only published version is in French translation. My reading is based on the extant manuscripts of the play as well as the published French text, though I cite from the latter only. Rouabhi's play remains unpublished. All citations are from a typescript of the play provided by the author, for which I thank him.
 3. Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
 4. Among the pioneers of postcolonial studies in France: Claude Liauzu, *Aux origines des tiers-mondismes: colonisés et anticolonialistes en France (1919–1939)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1982); Charles Robert Ageron, *La décolonisation française* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1994).
 5. See for example Jean Déjeux, *La littérature maghrébine d'expression française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992); Charles Bonn, *Kateb Yacine, Nedjma* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990); Guy Dugas, *La littérature judéo-maghrébine d'expression française: Entre Djéha et Cayagous* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990). Early examples of postcolonial approaches to Maghrebi literature include Jacqueline Arnaud, *Recherches sur la littérature maghrébine de langue française: Le cas de Kateb Yacine*, vol. 2 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1982); Marc Gontard, *La violence du texte: Études sur la littérature marocaine de langue française* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1981).
 6. Jean-Marc Moura, *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 151. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
 7. *Ibid.*, 20.
 8. *Ibid.*, 27.
 9. *Ibid.*, 20.
 10. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*. Trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). Originally published as *La république mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Seuil, 1999), 42.
 11. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xii.
 12. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).
 13. Alec Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick, and David Murphy concisely summarize the debates surrounding this controversial manifesto with the following question: "does *littérature-monde* offer an all-embracing transnational vista leading beyond the confines of post-colonialism, or reintroduce an incipient form of neo-colonialism even while proclaiming the end of the centre/periphery divide?" Alec Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick, and David Murphy, "What Does *Littérature-Monde* Mean for French, Francophone, and Postcolonial Studies?" In *Introduction to Francophone Postcolonial Studies, New Series*, vol. 1. *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-Monde*, ed. Alec Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick, and David Murphy (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 1–11.
 14. Gayatri Spivak and Emily Apter criticize world literature (in English) on similar grounds, making the case instead for the study of languages and the practice of translation. Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006) and Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013).

15. "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français." *Le Monde*, March 15, 2007. http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2007/03/15/des-ecrivains-plaident-pour-un-roman-en-francais-ouvert-sur-le-monde_883572_3260.html. Translated as "Toward a 'World Literature' in French". Ed. Daniel Simon. "Littérature-monde: New Wave or New Hype?" Special issue of *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 14.1 (2010): 113-117, 115.
16. Françoise Lionnet and Shu Mei Shih were the first to use the expression *transcolonialism* to designate "the shared, though differentiated, experience of colonialism and neocolonialism (by the same colonizer or by different colonizers)," as well as historical, political, and aesthetic alliances across heterogeneous postcolonial sites. Françoise Lionnet and Shu Mei Shih, eds., *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 11.
17. Olivia C. Harrison, *Transcolonial Maghreb: Imagining Palestine in the Era of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).
18. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "A Peace Without Arabs: The Discourse of Peace and the Limits of Israeli Consciousness." In *After Oslo: New Realities, Old Problems*, ed. George Giacaman and Dag Jorund Lonning (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 59-76, 65.
19. Kateb famously compared his use of the French language to a guerilla fighter "snatching a shotgun from the hands of a parachutist." Kateb, *Le poète comme un boxeur: Entretiens 1958-1989* [The poet as boxer: Interviews, 1958-1989] (Paris: Seuil, 1999), 56.
20. Initially the target of a carefully coordinated cover-up operation, the events of October 17 have been subjected to increased scrutiny in recent years. For a thorough account of this event, see Jim House and Neil MacMaster. *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Lia Brozgal argues that, because of the police and state cover-up of the massacre, literary representations of October 17 constitute an invaluable if heterodox archive of the event. Lia Brozgal, "In the Absence of the Archive." *South Central Review* 31.1 (2014): 35-54.
21. Arnaud, *Recherches*, 577.
22. Etienne Balibar, "Algeria, France: One Nation or Two?" Trans. Adele Parker. In *Giving Ground: The Politics of Propinquity*, ed. Joan Copjec and Micheal Sorkin (New York: Verso, 1999), 162-172; Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Mireille Rosello, "Farança-Algéries ou Djazaïr-frances? Fractales et mésententes fructueuses." *Modern Language Notes* 118.4 (2003): 787-806 and *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).
23. Balibar, "Algeria, France: One Nation or Two?," 164.
24. Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality*, 3.
25. Kateb, "Mohamed prends ta valise," 209-210.
26. Jean-François Lyotard uses the word *différend* (proximate to "disagreement") to describe the kind of conflict that emerges when two parties cannot agree on the very terms of the conflict. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Différend: Phrases in Dispute*. Trans. George Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
27. Kateb, "Mohamed prends ta valise," 212-215.
28. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Trans. Howard Greenfield (New York: Orion Press, 1965); Ranajit Guha, "Not at Home in Empire." *Critical Inquiry* 23.3 (1997): 482-493.
29. Abdellali Hajjat, "Les comités Palestine (1970-1972): Aux origines du soutien de la cause palestinienne en France." *Revue d'Études Palestiniennes* 98 (2006): 74-92.
30. Mohamed Rouabhi, *Les nouveaux bâtisseurs, suivi de Ma petite vie de rien du tout* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1997), 10.
31. Rouabhi, *El menfi/L'exilé* (2000), 24.
32. *Ibid.*, 51.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

VIRTUAL ENCOUNTERS IN
POSTCOLONIAL SPACES

Nollywood movies about
mobile telephony



Carmela Garritano

In recent years, African film critics have begun to consider dramatic changes in African cinematic production and distribution across various boundaries, as well as the aesthetic and narrative innovations these transformations have made possible. Critics such as Manthia Diawara, Lindiwe Dovey, Kenneth W. Harrow, Jon Haynes, and Alexie Tcheuyap have called for updated approaches attuned to reading these new forms of African cinematic and media production and, in the cases of Harrow and Tcheuyap, the dismantling of an outdated dominant critical paradigm.¹ Nollywood, the name used widely to refer to English-language commercial movie production in Ghana and Nigeria, is among the most vital developments in the field, and although for many years, with a few important exceptions, the study of Nollywood was taken up primarily by cultural and media anthropologists, the industry's ever-expanding transnational reach and extraordinary powers of reinvention have made it impossible for African film critics to ignore. Understanding Nollywood – an unabashedly commercial and apolitical, informal, low-budget, and wildly heterogeneous and syncretic cultural formation that aspires to be as big and bold as Hollywood and Bollywood – has entailed questioning some of the most deeply entrenched ideologies of the field. Governed by what Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael describe, in a slightly different context, as “the overdetermination of the political,”² African film studies has set out to articulate a uniquely and authentically African film language and aesthetic, recover the buried histories of African resistance, educate and politicize audiences, and give voice to Africans marginalized by dominant narratives, including Hollywood cinema. Its methods have been rooted in the hermeneutics of what Alberto Moreiras calls “locational thinking”³ and Achille Mbembe has described as “an intellectual genealogy based on a territorialized identity and a racialized geography, which privileges Africa as a site of identity and alterity.”⁴ These approaches to African film are ill-suited to Nollywood, a product of the structural and technological transformations of neoliberal capitalism that articulates with the entangled temporalities and geographies of our current historical moment. This is a period, Mbembe notes, in which the sites of politics have been displaced and the social has assumed the shape of an assemblage of events and accidents, desires and uncertainties. It also is a time in which the logic of margin and center, which has been reiterated by African

film studies, has proved inadequate to mapping the deterritorialized and fluid spatial relations put in motion by globalization and articulated in contemporary cultural forms like Nollywood. As I discuss here, recent Nigerian movies destabilize the field's racialized maps even further, remarking on developments in digital technologies and the spatializing processes they enable.

Disarticulated from African film studies, Nollywood movies have never sat well with postcolonial theorizing, either. Oriented toward colonial discourse and literary texts, postcolonial studies and its key concepts (hybridity and difference) have little bearing on a popular cultural form that engages the world through a "thematic of sameness."⁵ This worldliness, Mbembe notes, is articulated in myriad local cultural practices "through which Africans manage to recognize and maintain with the world an unprecedented familiarity."⁶ Simon Gikandi, likewise, has critiqued the narrow optic of postcolonial studies. For Gikandi, the privileging of literary texts as exemplars of globalization has eclipsed narratives rooted in "the material experiences of everyday life" in the postcolony. He locates "a powerful disjuncture between the global narratives and images that attract postcolonial critics and another set of narratives and images which do not exactly fit into a theoretical apparatus that seems bent on difference and hybridity."⁷ Gikandi describes this gap in spatial terms; it reflects, he writes, "a transformation of the institution of knowledge production" – a geographical relocation from the Global South (the Third World) to the Global North (the postcolonial scene of interpretation).⁸ To highlight the limits of postcolonial theory for analyzing globalization and a re-thinking of old maps, Gikandi lists several examples of this other set of unrecognizable global narratives, which he admittedly describes as "extreme."⁹ He quotes a letter found on the dead bodies of two young men from Guinea, stowaways who died in the cargo hold of an airplane headed to Europe. He mentions Somali migrants who wish to circumcise their daughters as well as migrants' demands for Sharia law. Though I agree with the general direction of Gikandi's critique, I am troubled that he implies an opposition between the critical and representational practices of postcolonial texts and the raw, bare renderings of the nightmarish experiences of living in the African postcolony or its diaspora. To put it slightly differently, Gikandi constructs a binary between postcolonial imaginative and theoretical practices located in the university and the informal, unauthorized narratives that react to or record, without imagination or reflection, the experiential. These other narratives of globalization emerge from and circulate outside of the cultural formation and geographical location of the university. It is as if every story that comes from Africans who lack the economic and cultural capital to qualify as "émigré native informants" must be an immediate, shocking, and unprocessed story of despair, death, or violence, and it is this narrative of despair that underpins many projects of neoliberal reform and the call for "development" to rescue Africa from hopelessness.

Nollywood makes abundantly clear that tragedy is not the only modality through which Africans engage the world, nor is the official sphere of cultural production the only location in which Africans theorize its shifting cartographies. This chapter tries to demonstrate that taking Nollywood seriously might provide a much richer and more nuanced understanding of the transnational, informal, and everyday cultural ecologies taking shape under current regimes of global capital and give us an appreciation for the sensibilities, affective engagements, and spatial imaginaries emergent in

the African postcolony. To make the point, I read two Nollywood movies as instances of vernacular theorizing about virtual space and mobile telephony in Africa. *GSM Wahala* and *Blackberry Babes* offer insightful critical commentary on cell phones in urban Africa and the development of mobile computing environments. They examine the intersection of virtual, material, and geographical space in the networked African city and explore the cell phone as an affective technology that motivates new forms of consumption and competition, as well as new vocabularies of self and agency.

TELEPHONES IN WEST AFRICAN FILMS

Africa's cellular phone use has exploded in recent years. While, in 2000, only one in fifty Africans had access to a mobile phone, eight years later, the figure had jumped to one in three. In 2010, the mobile phone penetration rate had reached 41%, and it was estimated that for every one hundred people, there were 41.4 cell phone subscriptions, compared to only 1.6 landlines per one hundred.¹⁰ Driven by advances in cell phone technologies, the expansion of the GSM network, the growing presence of multinational telecommunications companies and advertising firms in Africa, and a general climate of liberalization, a bold and dynamic mobile phone culture has developed in Africa.

It is within this context that for the first time we find movies in which the cell phone functions as an object of thematic investigation. Prior to the appearance of these movies, neither the analogue nor cellular phone had been taken up as the central theme or used as the primary plot device in a film in Ghana or Nigeria. In government sponsored documentaries from the period of decolonization and nationalization, such as *Ghana Reborn* (1982) made by the Ghana Film Industry Corporation, the mere presence of the phone in the frame signaled the promise of national development and modernity. In a scene set in an office of the national airline Ghana Airways, the phone is emblematic of Ghana's connection to the world. In state-sponsored and commercial narrative cinema produced in the 1980s and 1990s, the analogue landline phone was most commonly integrated into a movie's setting as a prop, unobtrusively and realistically narrating space. During this period, the analogue phone was also used to enable the movement of the movie's plot. In the commercial movie *Stab in the Dark* (1999), the good-time girl Effe, who has been dumped by her sugar daddy and boss Victor Ansah, uses the landline to make threatening calls to Victor's home. Through the phone line, her voice enters into Victor's household, violating and threatening the safety and sanctity of his home. Her voice becomes an actual affective pressure that causes him to have a heart attack. In this and other features, the phone's embeddedness in the story is articulated by the crosscut, a standard editing convention that mimics the back and forth talk of the phone call. Its placement in the narrative is seamless. The phone matters only because it motivates conflict.

The slim and sleek cell phone, seen in movies produced in the last ten years or so, has come to function primarily as a marker of global modernity, social status, and personal style; it might enable global connectivity – putting the businessman in touch with his overseas partners, for example, or linking the glamorous woman to a lover overseas. But more commonly, the cell phone appears as an embellishment displayed on the body. In the 2011 Ghana-Nigeria co-production *Who Owns the City*, the drug-dealing gangster Juch Kente wears a small phone ear-piece on his body,

which is decked out in an assortment of incongruous accessories. His large star-shaped nose ring and matching earrings, stylish gray hat, and even the pink gum he chews ostentatiously mark him as rich, modern, masculine, hyper-Americanized, and criminal. In Shirley Frimpong-Manso's *Perfect Picture* (2009), the shiny cell phone serves as an attraction, something to be looked at for its own sake. In a particularly apt instance, the film follows the three protagonists to the mall where they stroll past window displays and into various commercial spaces while talking to each other on their mobile phones. A three-way-split shot is used to simulate the movement of the three-way conversation. The shots pull apart to reveal individual long shots of each of the three glamorous, fully accessorized women chatting on her phone animatedly with the others. In perfectly synchrony with their talk, images slide across the screen, moving in and out of frame as the conversation shifts. The *mise-en-scène* and montage emphasize mobility and fun as the women talk on their phones and move boldly and leisurely through the mall.

GSM WAHALA

Released in 2002, two years after the Global Satellite Mobile Network (GSM) became available in Nigeria, *GSM Wahala* is one of the first Nollywood features in which the mobile phone becomes an object of investigation and critique. Directed by Afam Okere and produced by Sunny Collins, the movie was shot with an analogue BETA video camera and distributed, initially, on VHS cassette, appearing several years later for individual sale on VCD and DVD. A series of loosely connected vignettes about the appearance of mobile phones in Nigeria structures the narrative. Arranged like nodal points on a network, each story examines the *wahala*, a Hausa word that translates roughly as havoc or upheaval, provoked by the mobile phone, first, as a technology that unmoors callers from static and identifiable locations and, second, as a desired object, a commodity flaunted and displayed on the bodies of its users. For women and men, the trouble brought about by the cell phone is different. Women exploit their phones to deceive lovers, while those who do not have one will do whatever it might take to own the new technology. Men engage in deceit with their phones as well, presenting themselves as wealthy and well-connected business operatives, but in their relationships with women, they are owners of technology who cunningly seduce women with the promise of a GSM.

In its fast-paced and clever opening segment, perhaps its most interesting part, the movie explores the breakdown of public and private space in the shift from immobile to mobile phone use. The first episodes present a humorous commentary on the interplay and collision of digital and material space in an African urban environment and also express anxiety about the mobility of the cellular phone, a device which frees individuals from fixed locations. In the first scenario, a woman walks along a busy street while talking excitedly on her cell phone to someone she identifies as "Auntie." Her affective engagement with the voice relayed through her cell places her in a precarious position in the public and very busy space she moves through. Completely oblivious to the cars zipping by, she crosses the street and makes a *kunle* in the middle of a crowded footpath at the roadside. (A *kunle* is a knelling gesture practiced traditionally among Yoruba women when formally greeting an elder.) Engrossed in the phone conversation, the woman bumps into a young man who tries to walk

past her, almost pushing him into the path of a passing vehicle. The camera remains with the young man as he brushes dirt from his pants, his face contorted in shock and annoyance as he watches the caller continue carelessly on her way. Indignant, he remarks, "Imagine. She didn't even realize she pushed into somebody, and she's going. This is madness, absolute madness. In fact this GSM has created general street madness." The incident is funny because the woman is an inexperienced user of her phone. She does not seem to understand the technology she uses. As she talks and moves along the street, her body responds to the person on the other end of the line, as if the mobile phone had transported her body from its material location, as if she were physically present to her interlocutor. But of course her geographical position has not changed. Instead, her movements embody and render present in material space the virtual, and the intersection of these two spatialities is what has generated "street madness."

The second scene takes place on the Enugu campus of the University of Nigeria. A young woman walks and talks loudly, again moving through a public, outdoor space, this time a walkway outside a classroom building where other students sit and read or chat quietly. Unlike the first talker, she seems to be an experienced cell phone user, and the joke here plays on her mobility and on the private information she reveals to strangers. Her gait, like the conversation she participates in, is fast and furious, causing one of her shoes, another mobile apparatus, to give as she walks along the corridor, the heel buckling and flattening. The disjuncture between material and virtual space, which for her has been erased, is blaringly obvious and hilarious to the onlookers. The walker-talker, completely oblivious of her broken heel, shouts at the person on the other end of the call, accusing her of stealing her bra and tummy trimmer, and her personal talk crosses into public space. The camera again adopts the perspective of the perplexed and laughing onlookers, now privy to the secrets of this stranger, as they watch her limp away.

At the market while purchasing vegetables at a busy stall, a woman in the third vignette takes a call and begins shouting about her husband and another woman, her fury enacted as she waves her arms and walks briskly away from the kiosk and her purchases. She fails to notice that her behavior has attracted the attention of many. Swept up in the conversation, she quickly walks away from the trader and toward the exit, failing to notice that her *kaba* (a long piece of cloth wrapped and tied at the waist, like a skirt) has slipped from her waist, leaving her wearing only a black slip in the middle of a crowded market. In each of these three episodes, women's mobility and simultaneous affective engagement with their phones cause them shame or censure. They move through public space inattentively and violate its rules of privacy and decorum, and laughter sanctions each of the female characters as they misuse technology.

The fourth segment takes place at a call center. Here, three women pay to use the center's cell phone. The story parodies a scenario common across Africa in which those who cannot afford to own a mobile phone pay a small fee to buy minutes on a shared phone from an entrepreneur at a roadside kiosk or, as in this case, a small telecommunications business. The prevalence of these cell-phone call businesses means that many, many more people than own phones have access to them. And although landline phone centers predated mobile phone call businesses, the wider reach of cell phone networks means that phone use has expanded into areas never reached by the

landline. This might explain why the two older women in *GSM Wahala*'s fourth episode seem unfamiliar with how a telephone works. The first caller, an elderly woman, becomes angry at the person she is talking to and throws her arms about, accidentally slapping another customer. The second caller, who is also elderly, isn't sure what to do with the phone. She flips it open and blows three times on its face, willing it to work. The clerk explains that she must first dial the number before the call can be connected. Once the call has been made, the woman speaks too loudly and then suddenly starts to jump and sing, presumably because she has received good news.

In each of the opening vignettes, the trouble motivated by mobile phone use in public spaces arises from changing experiences of space and embodiment in the era of mobile telephony. The narratives center on the person using her mobile phone, for whom, during the course of her conversation, the boundaries between public and private space (and the talk appropriate to each) dissolve. Editing serves to emphasize the disruption of space caused by the mobile phone. Parallel editing, the technique conventionally employed to mimic the back and forth of the phone conversation, is rarely used in this segment of *GSM Wahala*. In other words, the narrative does not cut to the caller on the other end of the line, thereby erasing physical distance to highlight the shared time of the telephone exchange. Instead, the narrative stays in one geographical space and editing puts emphasis on the interpenetration of virtual and material interactions in the production of a physical space shared by the person participating in an electronic exchange and those excluded from it. Reaction shots of proximate listeners emphasize their shock, bemusement, annoyance, and anger as they witness the talker's voice and body reacting to the cell phone conversation and overhear information that is not meant to be shared. Laughter plays on these spatial practices of embodiment in an era where digital technologies free phones, in the hands of those who use them, to move through one space and be present in another.

The opening episodes of *GSM Wahala* represent a creative investigation of embodiment through the cellular phone, a phenomenon explored by Jason Farman, who has elaborated on the work of Henri Lefebvre to theorize embodied connections and embodiment as produced across digital space. Farman notes that "embodiment does not always need to be located in physical space."¹¹ To make the point, he refers to Allucquère Roseanne Stone's research with phone sex workers. According to Farman, for Stone "the entire project of phone sex was reliant on the fact that embodiment is something that is practiced rather than something that is given." The sex workers condense the multisensory experience of sex into the single modality of sound, which is then transmitted through electronic space. On the other end of the line, the sex consumer hears and feels "a fully detailed set of images and interaction."¹² The experience of participating in phone sex is a completely real and embodied experience even though it does not occur in a shared geographical setting. The film recreates and plays with similar instantiations of embodiment, dismantling the binary between the virtual and the real. In these opening vignettes, that which characters encounter as virtual, the voice on the other end of the phone, for example, produces embodiment and alters material space, and the movie deploys humor and irony to reflect on the interpenetration of digital and material space in networked environments.

Farman reminds us that spatial practices, like technologies, are entirely cultural. That is, they are shaped by and actively give shape to the settings in which they occur. In *GSM Wahala* embodied practices of space and the attachments and associations

cultivated with objects, the cell phone, most obviously, are cultural and gendered. The mobile phone signifies differently for women and men. Conflict arises when women use the new technology naively or inappropriately. Men, too, create *wahala* with their phones, but of an entirely different sort. It is only women who disturb public spaces when using their phones because their embodied responses to the virtual exchanges they participate in cause conflict in material space. Women's phone calls, furthermore, expose what is meant to be concealed: undergarments, cheating husbands, and other private matters, and these exposures deride women through humor. Men never misuse their phones, nor are their bodies uncovered or held up for derision. In a short scene centered on a male caller, it is night and a young man stands at the roadside holding a large travel bag. He talks on his phone, his private conversation spilling into the street. Two thugs overhear him mention the large sum of money hidden in his satchel. They overtake him, grab his bag, and run. In this instance, though the man's ability to use his phone at night in the middle of nowhere jeopardizes his safety, and though he uses his phone carelessly, it is the band of thugs that perpetuates mischief. In another episode, a young man sits in an outdoor, common area within an enclosed apartment compound. While his neighbors hang laundry on a clothesline and chat quietly in pairs, he swaggers about with a cell phone, talking loudly so everyone can hear. His irritated landlord approaches and grabs the phone from the talker's hand, only to discover that the phone is a toy and that the young man has been pretending to receive phone calls. The landlord chastises the young man for disturbing the peace and then tells him to pack his bags and leave. The young man's error is not caused by his ignorance. His is an intentional violation of public space, a performative gesture through which he has represented himself for others as someone rich enough to own a GSM phone.

There is a third woman in the call center episode described previously, and unlike the older women who preceded her, she is young and adept at exploiting the functionality of the cell phone. She calls someone named "John," and we hear her tell him that she is in the hospital receiving treatment intravenously and needs him to wire her money so she can pay her bill. The clerk, for whom the young woman's fraud is apparent, gives the caller a nasty look, which we are meant to share. Here, the film introduces the theme of female deception, which assumes two forms: the duplicity of wily women who take advantage of the cell phone's mobility to deceive men and the tricks women scheme to get GSM phones from men, who more successfully contrive to lure the women into a sexual relationship with the promise of a new phone. For the remainder of the movie, the narrative moves between these two stories about women's trickery. The focus on female deception, it seems, gives expression to unease within the popular imaginary about the mobility of telephony made possible by GSM technology and displaces that anxiety or uncertainty onto women. In the first story, Stella uses her mobile phone to answer her husband's calls when she is out with her lover, Billy. Since the phone is not tied to a location, Stella easily convinces her husband that she is at home pining away for him. Mobile telephony also makes it possible for Stella's husband to uncover her adultery. When his plans change suddenly and without his wife's knowledge, he travels to Owerri instead of Abuja and happens to catch a glimpse of Stella and Billy on the street. He immediately pulls out his phone and calls his wife, speaking with her as he, unbeknownst to her, watches her with her lover. Stella, of course, lies to him about where she is and what she is doing, and he

proceeds to follow Stella and Billy to a hotel room, where he barges into their room and surprises them. Clutching his phone, he remarks “If not for GSM, I would never have found out. Thank God for GSM.” In the second story of deception, Anita is a college student struggling to “reach the level” of her friends who own mobile phones. She skips her classes because she is ashamed that she doesn’t have a cell phone and engages in affairs with two older men, trying to convince them to buy her a phone, but to no avail. She twice attempts to steal a cell phone, but is caught both times. In the end, she ends up pregnant and alone. Furious, her mother screams: “GSM impregnated my daughter.” The movie punishes both female characters for engaging in dubious and deceitful behaviors.

BLACKBERRY BABES

In the last decade, commercial movie industries in Ghana and Nigeria have experienced dramatic change and diversification. The languages, locations, genres, and quality of films have broadened, and distribution has expanded transnationally to other African countries and to the African diaspora in Europe and North America. The modes and structures of distribution have become differentiated, too. Several producers have abandoned the straight-to-video model of distribution, which has been the dominant model since the industries’ inaugural years, and currently release in newly constructed multiplex theaters in major African cities and, transnationally, in cinemas in African immigrant communities. Distributors in the diaspora also have successfully exploited new technologies of transnational distribution, including satellite and cable television as well as internet platforms such as YouTube to bring Nollywood movies to an ever-larger number of viewers. Modes of distribution have not only multiplied and extended, as Moradewun Adejunmobi notes; they have become partially incorporated “into the official global economy by way of increased connection with dominant global networks and infrastructure.”¹³ Nigerian producers and distributors have entered into formal agreements with regional and global media corporations, such as DStv in Africa, Sky TV in the UK, and Dish Network in the US, to transmit Nollywood movies on various satellite and cable television stations. The stand-alone, subscription streaming site IrokoTV, which has been referred to the “Netflix of Africa,” has attracted international investment, according to Adejunmobi, worth about \$8 million and has registered over one million users.¹⁴

Distribution, I’d like to emphasize, is not the only register at which we find a push toward formalization and West African commercial video industries interfacing with the dominant, global economy. Production, too, and particularly at the high end, has become entangled with formal networks and global capital. Corporate sponsorship has facilitated the production of a burst of grade-A movies, referred to as New Nollywood productions, that have been released in theaters and festivals before they appear on VCD or DVD, and among the most prominent corporate sponsors are telecommunications companies.

The deepening interpenetration of global telecommunications industries and local movie production is part of the much larger entanglement of technology, telecommunications, media, and global capitalism under the current regime of neoliberalism. In this context, the growth in cellular phone networks and the extended reach of cellular connectivity have worked in concert with the penetration of the African

urban landscape by cell phone advertising. By way of television and radio campaigns, huge and conspicuous billboard displays, and the sponsorship of major art and cultural events like the Ghana Music Awards, the MTV Africa Music Awards, and the talent show *Project Fame West Africa*, the telecommunication companies Vodafone, MTN, Tigo, Glo, and Zain have become major producers of the textualities that define space in urban Africa. In a description of Accra, Ghana, Halifu Osumare has noted that the images and ideologies of telecommunications advertising “bombard one with the sound byte-like catchphrases and slogans that demonstrate a globalized corporate hegemony in the guise of a simple and ‘natural’ cosmopolitan lifestyle.”¹⁵ Ato Quayson has described cell phone billboards as an important element of “the discourse ecologies” of the urban, African streetscape.¹⁶ Here, I’d like to move beyond the street to suggest that cell phone advertisements represent strands in a much larger and constantly reconfiguring transmedial web that incorporates, among other visual textualities, Nollywood movies. Following Anustup Basu, who draws from Deleuze, we might think of this web-like configuration as an assemblage. Basu explains that “assemblages are energetic, diffuse, but practical combinations of statements, bodies, sounds, sights, events, matter, spaces, knowledges, beliefs or substantive stances that come together and disperse constantly.”¹⁷ In his book on Bollywood cinema since 1990, Basu tracks a radical intensification in the “geo-televisual attractions” that delineate “a new planetary regime of power/information.”¹⁸ He labels this regime “informatic,” explaining that its clusters of signs, styles, and spectacles assemble into an intense “decorative milieu” of “varied aspects of a new urban consumerism, lifestyle choices, novelties, boundless imaginaries of space and time” across a multiplicity of surfaces.¹⁹

West African cities bring together comparable intensities of desires, bodies, and objects to present spectator-consumers with a multiplicity of pleasurable, affective encounters with new urban consumerism and imaginary locations across media



Figure 14.1 *Blackberry Babes* (2011).

Source: Screenshots from film, DVD. Directed by Ubong Bassey Nya. Simony Productions.

spaces. A long take inserted prominently at the start of the movie *Blackberry Babes*, between the end of the opening credits and the start of the film's narrative, invokes the energy and intensity of an informatics of an African advertising assemblage (see Figure 14.1).

In the shot, the three gorgeous stars of the film saunter toward the camera in short skirts and stilettos, holding smart phones (Blackberry phones) in their hands. They look into and move confidently toward the camera, swinging their arms and hips to the beat of film's pop-music soundtrack. The women seem to have walked off a telecommunications billboard; their figures embody the lifestyle and spirit projected in cell phone advertisements – they are youthful, fashionable, cosmopolitan, and powerful. Global and glamorous, their movement through space transforms it. But what is most fascinating about *Blackberry Babes* is that the movie looks askance at the values and identities put forth in the geo-televisual image ecology. The movie makes explicit and holds up for ridicule an “imaginaire of consumption”²⁰ that correlates happiness and the good life with the purchase of commodities. Enlarged, expanded, and outfitted with personality and dialogue, the movie's narrative acts out “an economy that mobilizes passions such as greed, envy, jealousy, and the thirst for conquest.”²¹

I read *Blackberry Babes* as parody, and though the movie is unable to sustain the creativity and energy of parody through its sequel, *The Return of Blackberry Babes*, it does successfully use irony and humor in its first part to open a space for critical reflection on the meanings attached to the cell phone far beyond its technological functions in pervasive computing environments. *Blackberry Babes*, released in 2011, nearly a decade after *GSM Wahala*, takes up issues that are entirely different from those explored in the first movie. It reflects on the next major development in mobile phone technology, the smart phone, a mobile computing device capable of transmitting immaterial data through material space. While the humor of the first movie is derived from the newness of digital telephony and the fact that cell phone use has not been fully incorporated into the social, *Blackberry Babes* addresses viewers who occupy public spaces where mobile phone use has become widespread. Knowledge about rapidly developing phone technologies and capabilities, however, is not equally distributed, and those who possess smart phone expertise – in addition to brandishing the hottest and newest device – wield significant power. A signifier of social mobility, the Blackberry entices the women who desire it to do almost anything to have the newest, fastest model. Damisa, Vivienne, Nicole, Kim, and Keisha, the group of friends whose antics the movie narrates, perform, in a humorous and highly exaggerated fashion, the gendered discourses of competition and consumerism that surround the cell phone. As Damisa, who is the sexiest and most devilish of the women, puts it: “Who can catch up with me? Who can compete with Damisa?” Only those who own Blackberry phones are invited into Damisa's exclusive group, and to be a part of the hippest and hottest technology trend – to have the newest model of the Blackberry Bold and the knowledge to use it – the young women will do almost anything.

The movie opens with a common Nollywood scene: the shopping segment. Here, the spectator enters an exclusive retail space and virtually experiences the atmosphere and the pleasures of consumption. Tied loosely to the narrative through the placement of character, the segment functions much like a spectacle, interrupting the action or plot to put goods on display. Most viewers of Nollywood are very familiar with this plot convention, and so the opening initially seems entirely conventional.

We find ourselves in a small boutique where a man piles goods on to the service counter: he adds two dress shirts to his stack of things before he asks the clerk for his total (37,000 naira). When he pulls out his credit card, the clerk apologizes and explains that the store's credit card machine is offline. Frustrated, the man remarks that because he has no cash, he will have to leave his purchases. At this point, another customer, a woman, who we later learn is Damisa, steps forward and suggests that he pay online. He points out that the store has no internet connectivity, and she graciously offers to allow the man to use her smart phone to pay for his purchases. He gladly accepts and thumbs his credit card number into her phone. It isn't until the man has left the store and Damisa takes a stack of bills from her pocket to pay the clerk for her "good work" that we realize we've been witnessing a well-executed scam. Damisa and the clerk have tricked the man into giving Damisa his credit card information, which she will soon use to hack into his account.

Right from the start, the movie has introduced the idea of performance. Damisa and her accomplice act out their parts to perfection, fooling their victim and us, the viewers. This is also the first of several instances where a woman deceives a man by adopting a sexualized persona. But here, the artifice of the act of deception is represented as a drama. In this scene and throughout *Blackberry Babes*, the women act out what Judith Butler refers to as "an embodiment of norms" in their hyperbolic performance of the good-time girl, campus-vixen stereotype.²² Their movement, dress, and speech are excessive, eliciting from the audience not belief, but laughter. As Butler says of parody, "The artifice of the performance can be read as artifice; the ideal splits off from its appropriation."²³ The women's performances of feminized techno-glamour are highly exaggerated. Take for instance, the manner in which each woman displays multiple cell phones and in this way caricatures the image of the cell phone as an enchanted object. The most powerful women of the group, Damisa and Vivienne, each carries awkwardly in her hand a stack of four or five smart phones, which she flaunts to provoke envy among her friends (see Figure 14.2).



Figure 14.2 *Blackberry Babes* (2011).

Source: Screenshots from film, DVD. Directed by Ubong Bassey Nya. Simony Productions.

The smart phone is prominent in every shot. It mediates all social relations between characters and creates the conflicts that animate the plot. The women are either using their phones or talking about their phones, and Keisha, who is marginalized by the group because she does not have a Blackberry, spends all of her time plotting to get one.

Unlike the women in *GSM Wahala*, for whom the cell phone creates obstacles and embarrassment, these women move fiercely through public space, and they use their phones' full functionality to get what they want. Men are necessary only if they can provide the women with something of value: a new phone, a vacation overseas, or a high grade in a course. The babes wield technology with expertise; to be a Blackberry babe, a woman has to own and know how to use the latest model of the Blackberry Bold. She must be connected to the hottest social networks and be fluent in abbreviated text language. The women use their phones to bring the online world into physical space. Their phones change spatial relations as their virtual connections and networks become embodied in material space. In its most exaggerated enactment of the imbrication of online and offline worlds, the women exchange a series of text messages in class to plot against the lecherous professor Dr. Mukoro, who has propositioned each of them for sex. The text messages themselves are integrated into the sequence: we see, in close-up, their phone screens and the messages they thumb and send. They arrange for Vivienne to lure him into a hotel room, where the others hide and wait. When he is in bed and undressed, all of the women appear from the bathroom and use their phones to snap photos of him. If he doesn't give them all high marks on their exams, they threaten to post his pictures to Facebook. Damisa justifies the manipulations and trickery of the group this way: "All these men are the same. They only use you to satisfy their erotic pleasures and what do you get in return: peanuts." In this episode, the women exploit the pervasive computing environment to upend gender hierarchies.

Ambivalence collapses into melodramatic resolution in *The Return of Blackberry Babes*. Natalie, a sensible young student who cares little for phones, scolds her classmates for compromising their futures for the Blackberry. In the end, she wins a scholarship to study abroad while Damisa and Vivienne, the queens of the babes, are arrested for their hacking and cybercrimes. But narrative closure, perhaps applied to satisfy audience expectations for moral instruction, cannot completely contain the energies, desires, and affects or the various and discordant pleasures found in the parody and in the images of strong and smart women using technology to map and manipulate space.

The cellular phone in Africa, on the one hand, has been described principally within the context of modernization discourses; it is understood as a tool for the promotion of democracy or the expansion of markets. In film and media studies, on the other hand, theorizing around the accelerated development of new, miniaturized mobile technologies, mobile media culture, embodied space, and the emergence of pervasive computing environments and devices, such as mobile smart phones, has had nothing to say about Africa. Jason Farman's *Mobile Interface Theory*, a work I have referred to in this chapter, mentions Africa only as a place of lack and breakdown. If Africa figures at all in recent research on mobile phones, it is as an anthropological object of investigation or a marginal place where mobile phone use has yet to be analyzed. Here, I am arguing that *GSM Wahala* and *Blackberry Babes*, two recent Nollywood movies, be understood as expressions of vernacular theorizing around cell phone technologies, embodied space, and gendered discourses of consumerism. Appearing at distinct moments in

the emergence and integration of mobile telephony into urban space in Nigeria, the movies investigate the often conflicting spatial practices that surround the cell phone and raise questions about shifting power and gender relations.²⁴ Though clearly constrained by the commercial imperative that sustains Nollywood as a cultural practice, the movies reflect on mobile phone technologies and the transformations of everyday experience that these technologies and their African users have set in motion.

ENDNOTES

1. See Alexie Tcheuyap, *Postnationalist African Cinema* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011) and Kenneth Harrow, *Trash: African Cinema from Below* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).
2. Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael, "Introduction: Imagining the Present." In *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies*, ed. Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Anne Michael (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2000), 10.
3. Alberto Moreiras, *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 67.
4. Achille Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing." *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002): 257.
5. *Ibid.*, 255.
6. *Ibid.*, 558.
7. Simon Gikandi, "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.3 (2001): 632.
8. *Ibid.*, 648.
9. *Ibid.*, 644.
10. Gina Porter, Kate Hampshire, Albert Abane, Alister Munthali, Elsbeth Robson, Mac Mashiri, and Augustine Tanle. "Youth, Mobility and Mobile Phones in Africa: Findings in a Three-Country Study." *Information Technology for Development* 18.2 (2012): 145–162, 45.
11. Jason Farman, *Mobile Interface Theory: Embodied Space and Locative Media* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 21.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Moradewun Adejunmobi, "Evolving Templates for Minor Transnational Film." *Black Camera* 5.2 (2014): 75.
14. *Ibid.*, 82.
15. Halife Osumare, "Becoming a Society of the Spectacle: Ghanaian Hiplife Music and Corporate Recolonization." *Popular Music and Society* 37.2 (2014): 196.
16. Ato Quayson, "Signs of the Times: Discourse Ecologies and Street Life on Oxford St., Accra." *City and Society* 22.1 (2010): 73.
17. Antustup Basu, *Bollywood in the Age of New Media: The Geo-Televisual Aesthetic*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 12.
18. *Ibid.*, 34.
19. *Ibid.*, 43.
20. Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing," 217.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 126.
23. *Ibid.*
24. For more about intersecting spatial practices in African urban environments, see Ato Quayson, *Oxford Street, Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2014).

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CURIO FEVER

Tsubouchi Shōyō, Lafcadio Hearn, and the cultural politics of “collecting Japan” in the Age of Empire



Jonathan Zwicker

“THE WHOLE OF JAPAN IS A PURE INVENTION”

“Now, do you really imagine that the Japanese people, as they are presented to us in art, have any existence?” Vivian asks Cyril in Oscar Wilde’s *Decay of Lying* (1889).

If you do, you have never understood Japanese art at all. The Japanese people are the deliberate self-conscious creation of certain individual artists. . . . The actual people who live in Japan are not unlike the general run of English people; that is to say, they are extremely commonplace, and have nothing curious or extraordinary about them. In fact the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people. . . . And so, if you desire to see a Japanese effect, you will not behave like a tourist and go to Tokio. On the contrary, you will stay at home, and steep yourself in the work of certain Japanese artists, and then, when you have absorbed the spirit of their style, and caught their imaginative manner of vision, you will go some afternoon and sit in the Park or stroll down Piccadilly, and if you cannot see an absolutely Japanese effect there, you will not see it anywhere.¹

The better part of a century before Edward Said would publish his landmark study of the role of “imagined geographies” in Western Orientalism,² Wilde identified – with remarkable precision – the role of the imagination and fantasy in the “Japan” of *fin de siècle* Europe: the “Japan” inspired by collectors and dealers like the Goncourt brothers and Siegfried Bing, by the vogue for Japonisme, and by the works of European painters from Manet and Degas to Monet and van Gogh.³ From the beginning, European and American interest in Japan was intimately bound up with collecting: everything from Japanese prints and illustrated books to ceramics and seashells became objects of fascination for European collectors.⁴ But if, to the late nineteenth-century European, Japan was essentially “a pure invention,” to his Japanese counterpart Europe was, in many ways, very real. For while Europe would itself be the subject of Occidental fantasies throughout Japan’s modern period, these fantasies were grounded both in material reality and in a set of hegemonic

power relations that would inform Japan's relationship with the world from the late nineteenth century forward (and in many ways for a century before that).

Indeed, in Japan, as elsewhere in the non-Western world, the late nineteenth century was a moment when both academic and popular knowledge came to be recast within the framework of European modes and models. Here, geography was central: the world was reimagined as populated by a series of continents embedded within a Cartesian grid.⁵ History, too, was reimagined with the Japanese past recast in the mold of European progressivist historiography: Japan would get its own middle ages, for examples, as a way to make sense of this non-European past relationally with European historiographical practice.⁶ At the same time, there emerged what were essentially entirely new categories of knowledge such as "Literature" and "Religion" which attempted to understand the particularity of Japanese culture within frameworks derived from European examples.⁷

So much is familiar from the work of the last several decades on the structures of colonial knowledge and the intellectual politics of colonial modernity. In Japan's case, however, there is a further dimension to the construction of modern forms of knowledge in "the Age of Empire." Japan, too, would emerge at the end of the nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth century as a colonial empire in its own right and both state and academy would play important roles in spreading modern academic disciplines throughout the Japanese empire. Colonial anthropology, for example, would rely on the tools of Western ethnography to classify and categorize Asian and Pacific subjects and the pasts of colonized peoples would be reinterpreted within the framework of European historiography but always also relationally with Japan: if Japan would get its own medieval period, so too would Korea.⁸ Thus while Japan does not typically figure as an important area within postcolonial studies, this essay shows how both Japan's engagement with Western modernity and its own colonial practices provides us with new, illuminating perspectives on East–West relations within colonial and postcolonial contexts.

In Japan, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the theater played an especially important part in how cultural geographies were imagined. This is in part because of the role that the theater played in literally embodying "Others" – bringing before the eyes of an audience exotic figures ranging from the Qing Admiral Ding Ruchang to Shylock and Othello to Salome and Nora. For many Japanese in the early twentieth century, it was in the theater that they saw a "European" for the first time – even if Shylock was played by Kawakami Otojirō or Nora by Matsui Sumako.⁹

But the importance of the theater for thinking about cultural geography is also deeply linked to the history of the idea of the *Theatrum Mundi* in both European and East Asian discourse, a subject to which I will return below. It is within this context that Theater Studies emerged in Japan in the early twentieth century and the history of theatrical research in modern Japan is at once emblematic of the ways in which academic disciplines grappled with the place of Japan within a system of knowledge predicated on the normative Western example but also how Japanese intellectuals often saw the edges of this problem, how they grappled with its paradoxes, and how the intellectual career of one figure – Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935) – can be seen as emblematic of this situatedness of Japan in the world during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



Figure 15.1 Kawakami Otojirō as Shylock and Kawakami Sadayakko as Portia, *Merchant of Venice*, 1903.

Source and Permission: Tsubouchi Memorial Theater Museum, Waseda University.



Figure 15.2 Matsui Sumako as Nora, *A Doll's House*, 1911.
Source and Permission: Tsubouchi Memorial Theater Museum, Waseda University.

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

Totus Mundus Agit Histrionem: all the world is a stage. These Latin words are inscribed in thick gothic lettering above the entrance to the Waseda University Tsubouchi Memorial Theater Museum, which opened in 1928 to celebrate the career of Tsubouchi Shōyō and to mark his seventieth birthday and also the publication of the final volumes of his translation of Shakespeare's complete works, a project on which he had worked for two decades. The Museum is housed in a faux Elizabethan reconstruction of the Fortune Theater that Shōyō had himself designed. He had chosen the inscription because it was believed to have been the motto of Shakespeare's Globe Theater – and, of course, one of Shakespeare's most famous lines – but it also represents something of Shōyō's conception of the meaning and import of theatrical research: that theater was itself a model in miniature of human history and that the comparative history of world theater was perhaps the most pressing task facing the academy.¹⁰

In 1890, the year after Wilde published *The Decay of Lying*, Shōyō began lecturing on the idea of comparative literature at the Tokyo Senmon Gakkō, the forerunner to Waseda University. Shōyō was in his early thirties but had already published his 1885 essay on “the essence of the novel” which was the first real attempt to understand the history of Japanese fiction as part of a global history of the novel based on Western conceptions of that genre – the work for which he is today best remembered. Shōyō's 1890 lectures were based on H.M. Posnett's work which he had begun translating and the lectures themselves amount to the beginnings of comparative literature as a field in Japan and the first attempt to think critically about the role that comparison could play in understanding the history of culture and Japan's place within “the world republic of letters.”¹¹

Although Shōyō's early work was preoccupied with the history of the novel, most of his career was focused not on fiction but on drama – an interest that went back to his childhood – and his reputation during his lifetime would rest primarily on his work as a playwright, critic, translator, and historian of theater. And Shōyō's conception of drama is very much shaped by ideas of *geography* – both real and imagined – and how the comparative method can bring into dialogue objects of knowledge that seem disparate from one another – and in these cases offer an interplay of relationships between Japanese and Western cultural formations.

The Latin inscription above the entranceway to the Theater Museum – and the building itself – is suggestive of the work that Shōyō had envisioned for the Museum in several ways. The first is the role comparison was always meant to play in the intellectual mission of the Museum and also – one imagines perhaps unconsciously – the asymmetric nature of the reality of comparison: the building itself as replica stands in for the “missing” objects from the Western theatrical tradition that Shōyō envisioned eventually filling the museum. The second is the suggestion of homology between world and stage, a homology that gives to the study of the theater a particularly important place in the study of mankind with the theater serving as a kind of scale model for all of humanity and thus embodying human history in miniature.

But the motto is also suggestive of the work of the Museum in a less obvious way. At one level, through its association with the Globe, the inscription invokes an entire history of Western thought on the relationship between the theater and the world

that stretches from the Elizabethan era back through the notion of *theatrum mundi* to the Latin middle ages and the classical tradition and links up with discourses in geography and cartography in which this conceit played a central role in the early modern European imagination.¹² But if the motto seems but one more example of a classic “spectre of comparisons”¹³ in which “the West” provides a lens through which non-Western histories come to be understood and refashioned, the rendering of the motto into Japanese in a 1928 account of the opening of the Theater Museum is suggestive of a different history of this metaphor, a history that provides an example of a kind of comparison that in its own ways deeply resonates with Shōyō’s project of a comparative theater history.

In an article on the opening of the Theater Museum in the *Yomiuri* newspaper, the motto is described as follows: “on the crossbeam above the main entranceway is, designed by Shōyō himself, the phrase written in gold lettering in Latin ‘Tenchi ichidai gijō’.”¹⁴ Here, the Latin original of the English is rendered into an idiom intelligible to the Japanese reader, though not into Japanese as such. This six-character Chinese phrase – literally heaven and earth are one great theater – is, indeed, not so much a translation of the Latin as itself a phrase with its own rich semantic history. Just as the Globe motto points outwards towards continental Europe and back to a rich history extending into the classical period, so too does “tenchi ichidai gijō” point towards the Asian continent and to a connection between world and stage with a long history in Chinese thought.

The metaphor of life as a play extends back to the Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE) and plays an important role in Zen (Ch’an) Buddhist thought but the phrase becomes especially widespread during the late Ming and early Qing periods. Indeed, as Gōyama Kiwamu has argued, “it is the phrase that perhaps best symbolizes the thought of the late Ming and early Qing” and it is in this guise that the phrase enters Japanese discourse on the theater in the eighteenth century.¹⁵ In Japan, the idea of heaven and earth as a stage came into wide currency in writing about theater in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and provided a guiding cognitive metaphor for comment on the stage appearing within a broad range of works on theatrical history for almost a century up through the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

Yet when Shōyō himself rendered this phrase into Japanese – which he did on more than one occasion – he chose a different tack. In his 1920 translation of *As You Like It*, volume 16 of his edition of Shakespeare’s complete works, for example – which was likely the first time he had been faced with rendering into Japanese Jacques’ line from Act 2 Scene 7, “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players” – rather than drawing on the framing device of world as stage that was so deftly deployed by late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers to draw out the staged nature of the world and the worldliness of the stage, Shōyō invents an entirely new idiom: “ningen sekai wa kotogotoku butai desu, sōshite subete no danjo ga haiyū desu.” Here, Shōyō translates Jacques’ line quite literally into modern Japanese, but in so doing completely cuts it off from the rich semantic history that this idea had within Japanese and East Asian thought. For a writer so erudite in Japanese theatrical tradition, so deeply immersed in the culture of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century *kabuki*, and so attuned to phrasing and language, the dry formality of Shōyō’s rendering seems oddly out of pitch and certainly flattens out one of Shakespeare’s greatest lines. How could he not, one wonders, hear the echo of that governing image

of the early nineteenth-century stage in Shakespeare's language? How could a writer and scholar so deeply invested in the idea of comparison have so completely cut off his translation from any reference to or acknowledgement of this uncanny resonance? It is as if the language of Shakespeare could provide a way for thinking about the history of Japanese drama but that the history of East Asian thought was somehow incapable of providing a framework adequate for comprehending Shakespeare.

The asymmetrical nature of this framework – in which the Western example can serve as a model or metaphor for understanding the non-Western but the non-Western can never serve as the normative example for understanding the history of Europe – broadly marks the encounter of the non-West with European modes of knowledge in the nineteenth century. What I would like to suggest in the case of Shōyō is how this very problematic inflected his work: how he was aware – and critical – of the casual Eurocentrism intrinsic to the very academic disciplines through which he attempted to understand the history of Japan but also how he was unable to break free of the promise that these models seemed to hold for a universalism even if the promise of that universalism would always be delayed and denied. In many ways, this is the Gordian Knot of the non-Western intellectual in the Age of Empire: the desire to seek a universal framework through which one's own history and culture can be understood in comparative terms but the recognition that this universalism is itself derived from – and predicated on – the Western model as structuring agent.

CURIO FEVER

When the Theater Museum opened in 1928, Shōyō remarked, “Although it is called a museum, it is really a center for research on historical materials of the theater and is certainly not some place for the collecting of curios.” Shōyō then gives a specific example: “we are certainly not interested in boasting that we have a first edition of a woodblock print by so and so.”¹⁶ At one level, Shōyō here is explicitly rejecting what he considered the aestheticization and museumification of Japanese woodblock prints, a point he made explicitly in his critique of Western collecting habits in his 1920 study of Utagawa Toyokuni and his school. For Shōyō, the theater prints of nineteenth-century Japan were first and foremost “historical material” (*shiryō*) and their transformation into art objects – housed in European and American collections – had robbed researchers of access to these important archives.¹⁷

But for Shōyō, the term “curio” (*kottō*) had a particular meaning and resonance, deeply embedded within the politics of collecting in the context of empire. In 1912, Shōyō had written a play with the suggestive title *Curio Fever* (*Kottōnetsu*). In one scene, a young man watching a German couple cart off their purchases in a rickshaw remarks to his uncle:

They say that there are no longer any of the ordinary run of the mill curios left and these days it seems that there are many searching for tea rooms complete with accompanying trees and garden rocks or Buddhist altar rooms complete with the family's mortuary tablets, altar fittings, and decorations.

It seems, the young man continues, that “Japan itself has become one faded sacred, great big and old art object. Or put differently, it is a unique antique, one giant curio.”¹⁸

But if Japan had itself been turned into one great curio for Western collectors, it was just at this moment that Japanese collectors and art dealers had begun to turn their attention to China and Korea in the wake of China's 1911 revolution and Japan's formal annexation of Korea in 1910. Indeed, as Kuchiki Yuriko has shown in her recent book on the "house of Yamanaka," it was Japanese art dealers like Yamanaka Teijirō who played a critical role in shaping the vogue for Orientalia in Japan and in the West during these early years of the second decade of the twentieth century.¹⁹

And so it is suggestive that this reflection on the "curio-ification" of Japan is followed immediately in Shōyō's play by a dialogue between a middle school principal and a Buddhist monk; as the principal notes, the bronze statue of Confucius on display stood as a testament to "the honor and power of the Japanese empire," a sentiment interrupted by the appearance of a so-called "madman" – a Chinese exile who cries:

My country, China, was once proud. But now there is a revolution. The country has collapsed – Today everything down to the bronze statue of Confucius, the great shining sun of rectitude for our country, has been bought up by the Japanese.²⁰

Shōyō's play seems cannily to understand Japan's ambivalent place within the world during the Age of Empire: Japan as collected and collector, as object of the Western fetishism but as itself the subject of an Orientalist gaze fixed upon other nations of Asia.²¹ The Buddhist monk and the school principle uncomfortably *ape* the rhetoric and practices of Western collectors, calling to mind the late nineteenth-century cartoons by Western artists like Georges Bigot that depict Japanese with distinctly simian features in Western dress.

For Shōyō, the term *kottō*, or curio, had another point of reference as well: the work of Lafcadio Hearn who had published his *Kottō: Being Japanese Curios with Sundry Cobwebs* in 1902. Shōyō and Hearn had briefly been colleagues after Hearn had joined the faculty at Waseda University in 1904 and the two men would carry on a correspondence – in English – until the latter's death in September of that year. In many ways, the arc of the relationship of these two men is both critical for understanding Shōyō's own intellectual development and the increasing ambivalence which he would show to the West – as in *Curio Fever* – but it is also emblematic of a larger trajectory of Japanese intellectuals as they grappled with the "spectre of comparisons" that has so much haunted the intellectual history of the non-West in the twentieth century. In Shōyō's own correspondence with Hearn as well as comments he confided in others, we see an initial excitement and enthusiasm followed by disappointment and a growing sense of ambivalence.²² On the one hand, Shōyō expresses an admiration for Hearn's work and is eager to serve as a kind of "native informant" on the history of Japanese drama. On the other hand, Shōyō comes to see Hearn as essentially shallow, an aesthete more interested in his own interpretations of Japan and its past than in attempting to understand what Shōyō would consistently refer to as a scientific approach to history. In this sense, Japan was very much a curio for Hearn whose attitude was more that of the collector than the scholar.

Shōyō's own expressions of this unease were themselves almost emblematically ambivalent. In a short note on Hearn at the time of his death in 1904, for example,

Shōyō would write how when he read Hearn's work he would "feel as I do towards my dear mother," describing his work as "overly subjective" but moving nonetheless.²³ Hearn's work was shot through "with the tenor of a late nineteenth-century romanticist," and, for Shōyō, Hearn would always remain "a genius of the *fin de siècle*."²⁴

In private, Shōyō would be more explicit about his frustrations. His friend Ichijima Kenkichi, then head of the Waseda University Library, would record Shōyō's impressions meeting with Hearn:

[Hearn] had said he was interested in hearing about Japanese drama so I did quite a bit of research and made various charts and had planned to thoroughly introduce Japanese theater but it seems that he had a different idea. . . . [Hearn] was in the end a poet. . . . He is not someone who would spend enough time to study about something systematically and scientifically and then write about it later. . . . He was the type who wanted to take pen in hand as soon as he felt something.²⁵

But in addition to this ambivalence, Shōyō's relationship with Hearn was also marked by a deep sense of anxiety over language, over his ability to express himself, over whether or not he would be heard. In his letters to Hearn, he returns again and again to this theme noting his unease with written English but noting as well that he was more comfortable writing than speaking. Hearn's own relationship to the Japanese language was complicated: in the early twentieth century, he was one of the great interpreters of Japan to the Western world but much of his work was based on stories told to him by his Japanese wife Koizumi Setsuko as she would vividly recall after his death, a process emblematic of the ethnic and gender politics that often underwrote Western knowledge of the non-West at this time.²⁶

For Shōyō, there was thus a structural asymmetry to his relationship with Hearn, the same asymmetry that would mark the Theater Museum a quarter of a century later, that would mark most of Shōyō's work from this point on, and that would become a hallmark of many of Japan's intellectuals' relationship to the West across the twentieth century: the Japanese subject *could* speak, but to be *heard* he would need to speak in the language of the West and even then he might not be listened to. Indeed, when Shōyō found himself speaking both in the language *and* the scientific idiom of the West he found himself ignored, unable to represent Japan in a way that could easily be digested by the poet Hearn. "Japan" would always, or so it seemed in the early twentieth century, need to be spoken for, an object of interpretation, the "native informant" elided in the process – just as Wilde had intuited.

If Shōyō wanted to create a "scientific" and "systematic" history, Hearn was more interested in the mythical and mystical, like so many others who came over from America in the Gilded Age. In Hearn's case, there was also another dimension owing, one imagines, to his own complex sense of identity as Anglo-Irish born of a Greek mother, himself very much a son of empire. As Hearn's biographer Elizabeth Stevenson has written, "he wished, under gray Irish skies, to be Greek, to be pagan, to be even 'Oriental.'"²⁷ For his part, in "mimicking" the language of scientific history, Shōyō would cease to play the role of the native informant and begin to mount a critique of what he saw as the Eurocentrism of Western historians of Japan like Hearn

or Friedrich Succo. Indeed, Shōyō's critique of Succo in 1920 can be read as an extension of the frustrations he felt towards Hearn's dilettantism which, more than any event in his life, seems to have inflected his relationship with the West.²⁸

And here we can return to Shōyō's 1912 play *Curio Fever* for in it we see not just the Western collectors who have turned Japan in to "one giant curio" but also the Japanese who mimic them, who replicate their habits and rhetoric, who turn China and Korea into fantasies to be collected just as Japan had been.²⁹ But Shōyō is in no sense an anticolonial nationalist nor did his sympathies lie with the kind of Pan-Asianism that imagined Asian solidarity in the face of Western empire, such an important intellectual thread in Japan during his lifetime. Rather, despite his encounter with Hearn, he remained drawn toward and committed to the systematic and the scientific, an Occidentalism around which all of his ideas of scholarship revolved.

Shōyō would never abandon his Western models and his debt to Western methods, and if he could see this structural asymmetry for what it was, he could not see himself clear of it. If Japanese history were to be spoken, it would need to be spoken of in the language of the Western academy, understood in the idiom of the universal, through likeness and analogy to the Western example, even if one of Shōyō's insights was that such analogies were often unhelpful in making sense of historical reality.

But if, for Shōyō, Hearn seemed to belong to the romanticism of the *fin de siècle*, so far removed from the "scientific" historiography to which he was committed, Hearn would – in a most uncanny way – return to Shōyō's consciousness in 1920, in the very years when Shōyō would come to develop the intellectual underpinnings of a universal theatrical history that would inform the opening of the Theater Museum at the end of the decade. In 1920, Shōyō began reading Albert Mordell's 1919 *The Erotic Motive in Literature* – through which Shōyō discovered Freud – and Mordell's approach to the idea of universal themes in literature would have a profound impact on Shōyō's idea of a "sociological" or "anthropological" approach to the origins of theater in humanity's shared past, the idea on which the Theater Museum was founded. And Hearn plays an important role in Mordell's argument – indeed, Mordell would argue that "Hearn anticipated many of Freud's conclusions," especially with Hearn's emphasis on "unconscious memory" – what Mordell calls "one of the axioms of psychoanalysis, or rather one of its pillars" – and an idea that seems to inhabit Shōyō's own work in the 1920s.³⁰

Here, a decade and a half after his brief correspondence with Hearn, the "poet" of the *fin de siècle* returns as a kind of structuring presence in Mordell's argument. Shōyō's reading of Mordell – and through him Freud – seems ultimately symptomatic of the politics of academic disciplines in Japan and elsewhere in the non-Western world for much of the twentieth century: a figure of deep learning and erudition who is unable to escape the structural Eurocentrism of the very disciplines to which he was committed to make sense of the Japanese past, a figure who turns repeatedly, almost compulsively, to Western models to understand Japan as a specific example but finds at the center of those models not the scientific rigor he imagines but rather yet another layer of mythos often indebted to the spirit of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalism.

In this sense, the figure of Freud, to whose work Shōyō began to turn after 1920, provides an interesting point of reference. Freud (1856–1939) and Shōyō (1858–1935) were almost exact contemporaries and although their relationship to one another

is emblematically asymmetrical – Freud of course has no knowledge of Shōyō and barely mentions Japan in his published writing – we might here recall how, in one of his last works, Edward Said noted how Freud’s understanding of “besieged identities” could lead to an engagement with the world beyond Europe and that “the condition [Freud] takes such pains to elucidate is actually more general in the non-European world than he suspected.”³¹

It is worth pausing over Said’s late meditation on Freud in part because Said’s own productive use of the term “non-European” as opposed to colonial or postcolonial helps to make sense of Japan’s place within the *postcolonial world* despite the fact that during the Age of Empire Japan was obviously more colonizer than colonized. Shōyō is himself emblematic of this state of besieged identity: conscious, as *Curio Fever* suggests, both of the colonial world and of the ugly nature of Japanese colonial attitudes that mimicked the West, but also unable to break free of his intellectual commitment to Western historical thinking and to the image of “science” on which he believed such thinking was founded. In this sense, the Waseda Theater Museum – as both built structure and as collection – stands as a monument to this configuration of knowledge that emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: an institution built on the notion of the universal and the comparative in which the Japanese past is, quite literally, encased within a Western-style shell. That structure in no way negates or compromises the extraordinary work done at the Museum or the immense value of its collections for thinking about Japanese, or world, theater. Rather it serves as a reminder that even in a country like Japan – a country that was never colonized, that was itself an imperial power, that has one of the largest economies in the world, and that itself became a “collector” of all manner of “curios” in the late twentieth century from Monet and van Gogh to Rockefeller Center and the Seattle Mariners – even in Japan the specters of academic disciplines rooted in the Age of Empire still often guide and structure our ways of making sense of the past. But as we approach the centennial of the Theater Museum, it is possible – and necessary – both to recognize how, as Jacques Derrida put it in his own late meditation on Freud, “archivable meaning is” and “in advance codetermined by the structure of the archive,”³² and yet how that meaning can exceed the structures imposed by the archive when new questions are posed to the objects the archive contains, questions unimaginable to Shōyō himself because they take as a point of departure a critical stance towards the very disciplinary commitments from which Shōyō was never finally able to free himself.

ENDNOTES

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4. See Christopher Benfey, *The Great Wave: Gilded Age Misfits, Japanese Eccentrics, and the Opening of Old Japan* (New York: Random House, 2003) and Christine Guth, *Longfellow’s Tattoos: Tourism, Collecting, and Japan* (University of Washington Press, 2004).

5. On the introduction of Western cartography to Japan from the sixteenth century onward, see Kazutaka Unno, “Cartography in Japan.” In *The History of Cartography*, ed. J.B. Harley and David Woodward, vol. 2, bk. 2, *Cartography in the Traditional East Asian Southeast Asian Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 376ff; for a broader consideration of how the world was reimagined within the European scheme of continents, see Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
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7. On the category of literature in the late nineteenth century, see Michael Brownstein, “From Kokugaku to Kokubungaku: Canon Formation in Meiji Japan.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47.2 (1987), 435–460 and Suzuki Sadami, *The Concept of “Literature” in Japan* (Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2006); on “religion,” see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) and Isomae Jun’ichi, *Kindai nihon no shūkyō gensetsu to sono keifu: shūkyō, kokka, shintō* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003); on “art,” see Satō Dōshin, *‘Nihon bijitsu’ tanjō* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1996).
8. On colonial anthropology, see Tomiyama Ichiro, “Colonialism and the Sciences of the Tropical Zone: The Academic Analysis of Difference in ‘the Island Peoples’.” In *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, ed. Tani E. Barlow (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 199–222 and Nakao Katsumi, “Japanese Colonial Policy and Anthropology in Manchuria.” In *Anthropology and Colonialism in Asia and Oceania*, ed. Jan Bremen and Shimizu Akitoshi (Richmond Surrey, UK: Cruzon Press, 1999), 245–265. On the influence of modern Japanese historiography on colonial Korea, see Andre Schmidt, *Korea Between Empires, 1895–1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
9. On Kawakami Otojirō, see Mark L. Anderson’s two volume *Enter a Samurai: Kawakami Otojirō and Japanese Theater in the West* (Tucson, AZ: Wheatmark, 2011); on Matsui Sumako, see Ayako Kano, *Acting Like a Woman in Modern Japan: Theater, Gender, and Nationalism* (London: Palgrave, 2001).
10. See Morishige Noburō, “Waga kuni hatsu honkakuteki daigaku hakubutsukan no tanjō ni tsuite: Waseda Daigaku Engeki Hakubutsukan kaikan no rekishiteki igi.” *Nihon Daigaku Daigakuin Sōgō Shakai Jōhō Kenkyūka kiyō* 11 (2009): 133.
11. See Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
12. See John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. 76ff.
13. See Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), esp. 2ff.
14. “Kyō kaikanshiki no Engeki Hakubutsukan.” *Yomiuri shinbun*, October 27, 1928: 11.
15. Gōyama Kiwamu, “Minmatsu Shinsho ni okeru ‘jinsei ha dorama de aru’ no setsu.” In *Chūgoku tetsugakushi kenkyū ronshū* (Fukuoka: Ashi Shobō, 1982), 622.
16. “Kyō kaikanshiki no Engeki Hakubutsukan,” 11.
17. See Tsubouchi Shōyō, “Shibai-e to Toyokuni oyobi sono monka.” In *Shōyō senshū* vol. 7, ed. Shōyō Kyōkai (Tokyo: Dai’ichi shobō, 1977).
18. Tsubouchi Shōyō, “Kottōnetsu.” In *Shōyō senshū* vol. 2, ed. Shōyō Kyōkai (Tokyo: Dai’ichi shobō, 1977), 803.
19. Kuchiki Yuriko, *Hausu obu Yamanaka: Tōyō no shihō wo Ōbei ni utta bijutsushō* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2013).
20. Tsubouchi Shōyō, “Kottōnetsu,” 805.

21. See Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts Into History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
22. On the relationship between mimicry and ambivalence, see Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." In Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 20034), 121–131.
23. Tsubouchi Shōyō, "Koizumi Yakumo." In *Shōyō senshū* vol. 12, ed. Shōyō Kyōkai (Tokyo: Dai'ichi shobō, 1977), 471.
24. Ibid., 474, 475.
25. Ichijima Shunjo [Kenkichi] "Seikaroku" quoted in Sekita Kaoru, "Tsubouchi Shōyō to Koizumi Yakumo: shinshiryō kara mite." *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū* 43.8 (1998): 86.
26. Setsuko Koizumi, *Reminiscences of Lafcadio Hearn* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 36.
27. Elizabeth Stevenson, *The Grass Lark: A Study of Lafcadio Hearn* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 5.
28. See Tsubouchi Shōyō, "Shibai-e to Toyokuni oyobi sono monka."
29. On this point, see Kim Brandt, *Kingdom of Beauty: Mingei and the Politics of Folk Art in Imperial Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), esp. Chapter 5.
30. Albert Mordell, *The Erotic Motive in Literature* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919), 237 and 239. For the influence of Mordell on Shōyō, see Tsubouchi Shōyō, "Shōnen jidai ni mita kabuki no tsuikoku." *Shōyō senshū* vol. 12, ed. Shōyō Kyōkai (Tokyo: Dai'ichi shobō, 1977), esp. 256ff.
31. Edward W. Said, *Freud and the Non-European* (London: Verso, 2003), 55
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PART V

HUMAN RIGHTS AND
POSTCOLONIAL CONFLICTS



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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

INHOSPITALITY, EUROPEAN STYLE

The failures of human rights¹



Ali Behdad

I have chosen a rather general title for this essay to signal my broader theoretical interests in the issue of immigration as a *node* for cultural and political forms of identification in Europe. Instead of focusing on a particular immigration issue, text, or national context, I wish to discuss the broader cultural politics of Muslim immigration in Europe and the relationship of Muslim immigrants with their European hosts by way of elaborating a specific form of postcolonial alterity and the failures of human rights in Europe more broadly.² I am interested as much in the question of postcolonial representations of otherness as I am in the historical question of amnesia with regard to Muslim immigration, an amnesia that has enabled an exclusionary and disciplinary attitude toward Muslim immigrants. Hence, I begin with a theoretical discussion of the paradoxical nature of so-called “European hospitality” towards its immigrants and Muslim minorities and the historical disavowals that Europe’s inhospitable treatment of its immigrants entails. Then, I explore the politics and implications of academic, journalistic, and popular representations of Muslim immigrants within the context of Orientalism and European colonialism.

In “From Communist to Muslim: European Human Rights, the Cold War, and Religious Liberty,” historian and legal scholar Samuel Moyn argues that the recent cases brought before the European Court concerning religious liberty, especially the cases involving the Islamic headscarf, have drawn “not solely upon the exclusionary legacy of Western secularism but also upon the exclusionary legacy of Western hostility to secularism.”³ In light of this counterintuitive observation, Moyn maintains that contemporary treatment of Muslim immigrants and minorities in Europe has its origins in how Europeans dealt with the ideological “threat” posed by communism during the Cold War. The bias against Muslims in the European Court cases, he explains, are

unsurprising, since it does not seem that easy to separate European secularism from the Christian legacy it ventriloquizes. On this view, precisely because of religious freedom’s long-term links to the creation of a secular political space, it has proved discriminatory in practice. (64)

According to Moyn, the conceptual basis for banning Muslim religious symbols and marginalizing Muslims in general has nothing to do with religion in general or with Islam in particular; rather, its source “lies in Cold War anxiety that secularist communism would topple Christian democracy” (67). Put otherwise, European powers during the Cold War feared communism as secularism incarnate and they used the second clause of Article 9 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1950, which gives the right for certain governmental agencies to override religious beliefs for the “protection of public order, health, or morals,” to protect Christianity from the secularist influences of communism (65). Moyn claims: “Muslim has taken the place of the communist in the contemporary European imagination – and above all in the history of the religious liberty norm” (66–67).

Although Moyn is right to suggest that in today’s Europe the so-called “threat” posed by Muslim immigrants has displaced that of communism in the mid-twentieth century, and that the “ideal of religious freedom originated in, and long remained tethered to, the self-conscious attempt to preserve an explicitly and pervasively Christian society” (79), I want to take issue with his broader claim that the current disciplining and policing of Muslim immigrants and minorities in Europe originates from “cultures, laws and doctrines once crafted to stave off secularism” (80). The exclusionary attitudes and disciplinary policies toward Muslim immigrants, I argue, must be understood within the context of a broader and historically deeper ideological othering whose origin lies in the discourse of Orientalism and the project of European colonialism in the nineteenth century. The cultural workings and production of immigration politics in postwar (Western) Europe are marked by a profound historical disavowal of Europe’s colonial project and its need for cheap labor since decolonization that brought its former colonized subjects to the metropolis. Though attentive to the historical and sociological differences in the immigration debate in various European nations, my focus in the following pages rests on how Muslim immigrants are collectively represented by politicians, academicians, political pundits, and journalists throughout Western Europe, representations that are simultaneously produced by and are productive of inhospitable policies towards them. More specifically, my interest lies in the cultural and political implications of such views with regard to the everyday lives of Muslim immigrants as postcolonial subjects, and in what this might mean for the prospect of harmonious co-existence in an age of globalization. What do representations of Muslim immigrants reveal about the broader politics of immigration in postcolonial Europe? How do these representations contribute to contemporary political debates about immigration ideologically? And how do these representations prevent Europeans to live harmoniously with their Muslim neighbors?

EUROPEAN HOSPITALITY

Even a cursory glance at the ways in which European politicians and media portray the continent’s relationship with Muslim immigrants reveals that Europe, especially Western and Northern, uses the model of hospitality and tolerance to describe this association, a model that obscures in a disavowing fashion the economics of immigration, the history of European colonialism, and a deep-seated racism in Europe, all

of which limit the boundaries of hospitality and claims of tolerance. Hospitality, as Derrida reminds us, is

an insoluble antinomy, a non-dialectizable antinomy between, on the one hand, *the* law of unlimited hospitality (to give the new arrival all of one's home and oneself, to give him or her one's own, our own, without asking a name, or compensation, or the fulfillment of even the smallest condition), and on the other hand, the laws (in the small plural), those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional.⁴

The notion of hospitality constitutes an aporia in which the claim of absolute hospitality always clashes with hospitality by right, that is, a more conditional form of hospitality in which the alien other is subjected to a broad range of restrictive immigration laws and forces that adhere to new cultural norms and social values through assimilation and "integration."⁵ The incommensurable difference between juridico-political laws of hospitality and the absolute law of unlimited hospitality renders the relation between host and guest constitutively ambiguous, making it constantly teeter between discourses of xenophilia and practices of xenophobia, claims of reception and instances of rejection, appearances of inclusion and cultures of exclusion.⁶

The contradictory nature of Europe's relation with its Muslim immigrant is symptomatic of a broader contradiction in the way democracy is imagined with the establishment of the European Union. As Étienne Balibar explains, the notion of a European community or people encapsulates both the idea of *ethnos* (or people as imagined community) and *demos* (the people as a collective with certain rights and representational power), a "double-faced construction" that interpellates the individual both at the level of universality – "the right to education, the right to political expression, the right to security and at least relative social protections" – and at the level of a particular national belonging which is exclusionary in nature.⁷ The complex contradiction posed by a democratic composition of people in the form of a nation, he further explains, leads "inevitably to systems of *exclusion*: the divide between 'majorities' and 'minorities' and, more profoundly still between populations considered as native and those considered foreign, heterogeneous, who are racially and culturally stigmatized" (8). Balibar coins the concept of "European apartheid" to describe the contradictory and opposite movement of inclusion and exclusion, which results in the "reduplication of external borders in the form of 'internal borders,' stigmatization and repression of populations whose presence within European societies is nonetheless increasingly massive and legitimate" (x). While the idea of "Europe" demands inclusion and universality, the notion of a nation-state – "France" or "Germany" or "Netherlands" – implies exclusion and national identification, which often, if not always, are defined along ethnic, racial, and religious lines. To the extent that "everywhere that nations exist nationalism reigns," the nation-form is a "*structure capable of producing determinate community effects*," effects that are always exclusionary in nature (23, 21). In other words, the idea of "nation" rests "upon the formulation of a *rule of exclusion, of visible or invisible borders*, materialized in law and practice" (23). What makes Muslim immigrants the excluded community *par excellence*, I would add, is the fact that they are considered neither "ethnically" European, having been marked as racially other since the age of Empire, nor "politically" European

in light of the Western perception of Islam as being “incompatible” with democracy. Muslim immigrants constitute the quintessentially differential “others” for European countries both at the universal level and at the level of national belonging.

DISAVOWING HISTORY

In defining immigration as a matter of conditional hospitality, Europe denies that its everyday practices of hostility and exclusionary attitudes towards immigrants have always accompanied its sanctimonious discourse of tolerance, communitarianism, and human rights in the postcolonial era. Here, disavowal ensures the coeval existence of hospitality and hostility, the enlightenment discourse and claims of tolerance and human rights, as well as the “intolerant” laws that regulate and restrict Muslim foreigners/immigrants. My notion of disavowal is akin to the Freudian notion of negation – in this regard, I should add in passing, Europe’s relationship with its immigrants shares certain cultural and ideological tendencies similar to those of the United States in its treatment of new immigrants. In contrast to repression in which what is repressed has no access to our consciousness, Freud explains that in negation “the subject-matter of a repressed image or thought can make its way into consciousness [but] on condition that it is *denied*.”⁸ Negation, Freud elaborates, “is actually a removal of the repression, though not, of course, an *acceptance* of what is repressed” (214). In negation, one may acknowledge an event, but the subject either denies its significance or refuses to take responsibility for it. As such, negation is a split perception of what constitutes our reality, a perception vacillating between denial and a supplementary acknowledgement.

Europe’s relationship with its Muslim immigrants entails a negative acknowledgement of what is historically, politically, and collectively suppressed. Forgetting here is a deliberate form of disavowal in which one consciously decides to keep certain knowledge *unacknowledged* – unacknowledged, partly because acknowledgment requires a certain amount of reflexivity and taking responsibility, but largely because disavowal is both politically expedient and ideologically convenient: “To deny something in one’s judgment is at the bottom the same thing as to say: ‘That is something that I would rather repress’” (Freud, 214). Although the structure of disavowal in Europe’s postcolonial relationship with its Muslims resembles that of the United States with its immigrants, the mechanisms by which amnesia works are different as are the political struggles with immigration. It helps to describe briefly the differences in Europe’s deliberately forgetful relationship with Muslims and specify further my broader theoretical notion of amnesia within the context of postcolonial immigration to this radically ambivalent continent.

By describing Europe’s postcolonial relationship with its Muslim immigrants in terms of disavowal, I wish to make several interrelated arguments. First, I suggest that such a relationship disavows the colonial context within which it is inscribed. Although in countries like France, Holland, and England the majority of Muslim immigrants are from postcolonies, discourses and policies of immigration often ignore cultural and political implications of the histories that have produced migration from the former colonies. It is not that French, Dutch, or British citizens deny their colonial past, but that the effects and implications of their colonial history on immigration are often ignored. In making this general claim, I am not claiming that there are no

differences in how these countries view Muslim immigrants, but I want to underscore how their relations with immigrants express a similar form of historical disavowal about the colonial roots of postwar immigration. As Balibar and Maxime Silverman have cogently argued in regards to France, the juridical structures of former colonial states “were largely formed in the context of management of the colonies abroad and immigrants at home, and which are still the source of modern forms of exclusion today.”⁹ Contemporary discourses of immigration in Europe tend to obscure how the new postcolonial ordering of social relations between European citizens and Muslim immigrants are formed and informed by European colonialism. In the context of France, for example, Elisa Camiscioli has thoughtfully demonstrated how the myth of “colorblind” France and its “universalist claims of French national belonging” obscure how policymakers and social scientists around 1900 “employed racial hierarchies to judge the quality of foreign labor, and its prospects for citizenship” (11).¹⁰ Contrary to the claims of many scholars, politicians, and popular commentators that “race played no role in constructing French national identity,” in France, Camiscioli’s archival research shows that “in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, racial discourses were elaborated and deployed with reference to both immigration and colonization” (11). What universalist claims of national belonging and human rights eclipse are highly conditional and calculated terms of French hospitality. The productivity studies of Jules Amar, a prominent theorist of work science, during the first decade of the twentieth century compared, contrasted, and eventually hierarchized labor performance by immigrants from the colonies with that of white Europeans from Poland, Italy, and Greece. Although France, unlike the United States, never implemented quota laws that would deny “colonial immigrants the ‘right to migrate,’” the pseudo-scientific theories of work by scientists such as Amar nonetheless played an important role in how employers and representatives of government ministries considered and recruited foreign labor and immigrants in France.

Second, Europe’s postcolonial relation with Muslim immigrants is marked by a disavowal of the neo-industrial revolution throughout Western Europe after WWII, which led to the importation of immigrant labor from North Africa, Turkey, and South-east Asia. During the boom years of the 1950s and ’60s, Western European countries imported hundred of thousands of these migrant laborers who were indispensable to economic prosperity of countries such as England, France, the Netherlands, and Germany. These immigrants, however, were and are still socially marginalized and politically denied full participation, as they have been treated as temporary migrants, as *Gastarbeiter*. The violent uprising by immigrant youth in Paris and other French cities’ *banlieux* in 2005 were indeed an expression of the depth of such economic, political, and social disenfranchisement that continues to this day, especially in the case of children of those migrant workers. In fact, as many activists and immigrant rights advocates have pointed out, unemployment among the immigrant youth hovers well above 23 percent according to official statistics.¹¹ Balibar observes:

What “national preference” means today is that immigrants, beginning with foreigners in irregular situations or who can easily be rendered illegal, are deprived of fundamental social rights (such as unemployment insurance, health care, familial allocations, housing, and schooling) and can be expelled as a function of “thresholds of tolerance” or “capacities of reception and integration” that are

arbitrarily established according to criteria of “cultural distance” – that is, race in the sense the nation has taken on today. (37)

Moreover, the racial and social discrimination against Muslim immigrants compounded by high unemployment and poverty have produced a profound sense of resentment and anger among these disenfranchised communities. Although European discourses and practices of immigration acknowledge some of these historical facts about Muslim immigrants, they refuse to consider the implications and consequences of policies that have brought these now “unwanted” immigrants to Western Europe in the first place. Instead, government officials and political pundits resort to a discourse of blame that views Islam and Muslim cultural practices as the cause of their socio-economic disenfranchisement. That Nicolas Sarkozy, the Interior Minister at the time of uprisings, referred to the immigrant youth as *racaille* (scum), a term with implicit racial and ethnic connotations in French, testified to this mode of historical disavowal, not to mention racism, toward Muslim immigrants.¹²

Third, Europe’s relationship with Muslim immigrants entails what Stanley Cohen calls “contemporary denial” in which a “perceptual filter is placed over reality, and some knowledge is shut out.”¹³ The pretense of tolerance in Europe eclipses both a deeply rooted form of racism whose genesis dates back to European colonialism and underlies the relation between Europeans and immigrants *and* the disciplining and policing of Muslim immigrants by a complex network of state apparatuses. According to Balibar, “the current development of a true *European apartheid*” means “European citizenship” is conceived “as a postcolonial isolation of ‘native’ and ‘nonnative’ populations” (170). The fear of terrorism since 9/11, compounded by the later events of Madrid and London bombings, not to mention the murder of Theo van Gogh in Holland and Muslims’ angry reaction against the Danish cartoonist portrayal of Prophet Mohammad, has broadened the anti-Muslim sentiment while legitimizing the extent of disciplinary power throughout the European Union, as Muslim immigrants are now routinely viewed as political menace and are subjected to surveillance, interrogation, incarceration, and deportation. Europeans fail to acknowledge how ironically the very construction of Muslim immigrants as intolerant is itself productive of an ideology of intolerance towards them. Europeans constantly demand and European states perpetually impose strict, if not repressive, conditions and rules upon immigrant populations in the name of integration. To deal with the avowed intolerance of Muslim immigrants, their so-called rejection of Europe’s liberal democratic culture, Europe ironically becomes intolerant towards them, keeping them in a “status of legal tutelage,” as Balibar points out (40). This is the contradictory logic that underpins discourses and policies of immigration throughout Western Europe today.

THE ORIENTALIST ORIGIN OF “L’AFFAIRE DU FOULARD”

The structure of disavowal in Europe’s postcolonial relationship with Muslim immigrants is discursively and ideologically indebted to Orientalism – and here is where the issue of the stereotype as an ideological form of “othering” becomes significant as a mechanism of forgetting.¹⁴ I contend that disavowing discourses of immigration are *discursively* indebted to Orientalism because current perceptions of Muslim

immigrants in Europe are linked to how European travelers, writers, and artists have traditionally represented the people of the Middle East – “the Orient” – since the late eighteenth century. Not only are such discourses peppered with Orientalist stereotypes in their depictions of Muslim immigrants, but the stylistics of these new representations function in a similar fashion to make these Orientalist statements seem factual and objective. And I say new discourses of Muslim immigration are *ideologically* indebted to Orientalism because they display similar ideologies of ethnocentrism, progress, and race to differentiate European citizens from Muslim immigrants.

Nowhere is the discursive indebtedness of contemporary discussion of immigration to Orientalism more evident than it is in the debate about Islamic *hejab*. Indeed, the veil is the most culturally and politically powerful trope in contemporary European discourses of immigration, a trope whose origins can be located in the vast archive of Orientalism. It is worth noting here that the notion of veil is often used in a generalizing fashion, which conveniently conflates several articles of clothing associated with *hejab* (the Muslim dress code for women marked by modesty) such as *rosary* (or “foulard” in French meaning headscarf), *abaya* or *rupush* (which is a loose, long robe), *chador* (a long square piece of often black cloth, worn mostly by Iranian and Iraqi Shi’a women, that covers the whole body), and *niqab* (the extremely conservative square of black material that completely covers a woman’s face with a small slit for the eyes which is popular among Wahhabi Sunnis). Considered a signifier of Muslim women’s oppression and religious backwardness, the Islamic *hejab* offers a crucial site to construct and reaffirm a hierarchical and “civilizing” relation between Europe and its Muslim immigrants. As Joan Scott notes in the case of France, the veil has become a “screen onto which [are] projected images of strangeness and fantasies of danger – danger to the fabric of French society and to the future of the republican nation.”¹⁵ The veiled woman is considered the embodiment of what stands against the ideals and principles of the Enlightenment, and as such functions both to single out Muslims as the enemy and to secure a “mythic vision” of a secular and enlightened Europe, as I elaborate below.¹⁶

At least since 1989, when three North African female students were thrown out of school for refusing to remove their Islamic *hejab* in a town near Paris, “l’affaire du foulard” has served as a critical site for drawing a clear line between what is European (i.e., secular, progressive, free, democratic, equal, and rational) and what is Muslim (i.e., religious, backward, despotic, undemocratic, unequal, and irrational). The debate over headscarves culminated in the passage of a law in France, a court ruling in Germany, both banning the Islamic *hejab* in schools, and the demand for banning the *niqab* by Jack Straw and Tony Blair in England. As in the colonial era, such a construction of the veil is strategically deployed to provide a marker of cultural difference, a sign of Muslim intolerance, a signifier of Muslim women’s oppression, and consequently as a rationale for the exercise of disciplinary power over the Muslim other. The affair has been traditionally constructed, as Maxime Silverman and Scott have described, in terms of a binary between secularism and difference which pits Islam against the secular Republic: “Islam is obscurantist and anti-rational whereas the secular Republic is founded on the rationalist principles of the Enlightenment” (Silverman, 112). Silverman’s remark holds true in other European countries as well regardless of republican or monarchical traditions. The headscarf controversy provides a context in the postcolonial Europe to mark the Muslim immigrant as fanatic,

repressed, backward other who needs to be rescued from her Islamic fanaticism/radicalism, enlightened with notions of democracy and freedom, and assimilated into the more evolved European civilization and community.¹⁷ “By outlawing the headscarf,” as Scott argues in the case of France, “the state declared those who espoused Islam, in whatever form, to be literally foreigners to the French way of life” (149). Throughout Western Europe, the driving force behind the banning of Islamic *hejab* has been the preservation of a mythical and universalist notion of a secular and enlightened European identity.

While the veil as a sign of the Muslim other’s intolerance and backwardness has offered radical rightwing parties a useful tool with which to pronounce and justify their anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant positions, its function is broader in its cultural scope and more general in its political application. The veil, “as a system of symbolic and material marking,” proves useful not only politically but also culturally and economically in a more general and generalizing fashion, as Minoo Moallem elaborates within a different context.¹⁸ Commenting on “l’affaire du foulard” and the banning of headscarf in schools, Pierre Tevanian has cogently remarked that “[t]here exists in France a cultural racism, which targets the descendants of the colonized, and primarily picks upon their Muslim Identity.”¹⁹ The passage of the ban on headscarf, he goes on to argue, reaffirms “a symbolic order . . . which we can call colonial, where certain people were considered sub-human primarily due to their Muslim identity, dedicated to remaining docile and invisible servants or targets and scapegoats” (23). While in the colonial context such a differential mode of identification was mobilized to dominate and exploit the colonized, today the binary enables the production and maintenance of Muslim immigrants as docile and invisible servants. The binary of colonizer and colonized is thus rearticulated as the modern and secular European citizen and religious and traditional Muslim immigrant, while the discourse of a civilizing mission is replaced with a more ambivalent discourse of assimilation and integration, one which is committed to universal secularism while insisting upon the unassimilability of Muslim others.

As in the colonial era, the veil sanctions a paternalistic relation between European and Muslim women by enabling a discourse of rescue. Tevanian’s aforementioned observation is helpful in complicating Scott’s claim that what fuels the headscarf controversy today is the mythical French national identification with *laïcité* and *communautarism*, and not merely the result of French racism or Islamophobia. For disavowed in discourses surrounding the Islamic *hejab* in Europe is what Tevanian correctly calls a “colonial order.” Like their English counterparts’ obsession with the Hindu rite of *sati* in British India to claim a discourse of “rescuing” the brown woman from the brown man, the French view the Islamic *hejab* as a symbol of Muslim women who are oppressed by their “tyrannical” fathers and husbands, and they use it to justify their unfinished *mission civilisatrice*. We witness the residues of the French colonizers’ discourse of rescue in today’s debate surrounding the headscarf. Responding to “l’affaire du foulard” of 1989, the writer Bernard Henri-Lévy wrote that the most effective way to “liberate” young Muslim women in France was not to exclude them from schools but to subject them to France’s secularism and republicanism: “We have young ‘beurs’ who arrive at school impregnated with beliefs, taboos and a form of servitude inherited from their families. The secular school must speak to them and liberate them” (285).²⁰ Henri-Lévy’s comment, though made in order to

actually defend the right of women to wear their *hejab*, ironically echoes the European colonizers' claim of "rescuing" or "liberating" the colonized woman from the "oppressive" colonized man. As in the discourses of colonialism, the current representations of Muslim women portray them as oppressed by their male relatives and by Islamic tradition. Sensationalist stories of North African men beating, burning, raping, and killing Muslim girls to enforce Islamic codes of dress in popular media throughout Western Europe have once again created a cultural consensus about the need to rescue and liberate Muslim women from the oppressive grip of their despotic fathers and fanatic brothers.

Let me underscore, albeit in passing, that this Orientalist perception is further perpetuated and "authenticated" by reactionary Muslim immigrants like the former Dutch official and current American Enterprise Institute affiliate Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who insists that *hejab* is a symbol of obscurantism and the oppression of women, arguing that Islam is not compatible with values of Enlightenment liberalism – it is worth noting here that she uses "obscurantism" in the same way Enlightenment philosophers used to label their religious "enemies." In countless interviews and in her writing, Hirsi Ali has described Islam as "the new fascism . . . in which women who have sex before marriage are stoned to death, homosexuals are beaten, and apostates like [her] are killed," claiming that "Sharia law is as inimical to liberal democracy as Nazism."²¹ Comparing Islam to a "mental cage," she admonishes enlightened Europeans to not "prolong the pain of that transition [i.e., from "the world of faith to the world of reason"] unnecessarily, by elevating cultures full of bigotry and hatred toward women to the stature of respectable alternative ways of life."²² Such a discourse of rescue, perpetuated by "native informants" such as Hirsi Ali, is ideologically useful because it helps to disavow the concrete social factors that have prevented Muslim immigrants from integration, factors such as racial discrimination, high unemployment rates, and inadequate education opportunities.

THE POST-9/11 POLITICS OF THE VEIL

More importantly, in the politicized atmosphere of post-9/11, the veil has been further construed as a powerful tool in the service of terrorism – the demands by Jack Straw, Tony Blair, and Nicolas Sarkozy that Muslim immigrants not wear *hejab* in Britain and France so that they can be integrated and thus saved from Islamic radicalism, or the "Islamic zeal," offer an exemplary instance of how the veil is automatically linked to violence and terrorism. Blair, for example, referred to Islamic dress as a "mark of separation."²³ Hirsi Ali has claimed that "Violence is inherent in Islam – it's a destructive, nihilistic cult of death. It legitimates murder."²⁴ The link between Islamic *hejab* and terrorism is evident in the following remark by Gilles Kepel, a member of the powerful blue-ribbon commission that created the French law banning religious symbols from public schools:

The issue is not a piece of cloth. . . . The issue is building defensive citadels of identity. When you look at the people who are arrested for terrorist actions, you see how step by step, this evolution started with sporting jellabas and growing beards. Then, they severed cultural links. And then they became easy prey [for] these jihadist generals.²⁵

What is remarkable about Kepel's claim here is the way in which the Islamic headscarf and more generally any item of clothing associated with the Islamic culture is figured as a metonym for the larger political threat that Islam is thought to pose for Western democracy and civilization. The war on the veil in this way is made to seem a part of the broader "war on terror." As a result, the European states' treatment of their Muslim immigrants and citizens has become a matter of surveillance and discipline marked by racism and violence towards them. Such an inhospitable treatment, on one level, forces the immigrants to remain docile and invisible servants, while on another it rationalizes and normalizes the exercise of disciplinary power over these immigrants. The inhospitable and intolerant treatment of Muslim immigrants, however, ironically produces the very problem it aims to solve – that is religious and political radicalism among the disenfranchised Muslim immigrant youth, which in recent years has led some of them to commit violent and terrorist acts.

Kepel's linking of the veil with terrorism foregrounds a second Orientalist trope in contemporary discourses about Muslim immigrants in Europe, namely the association of Islam with intolerance and violence. Although made in the context of the so-called "war on terror," Kepel's remarks speak to a broader tendency in the West to associate Muslim identity with fanaticism and despotism, a tendency that dates back at least to the early days of Europe's colonial encounter with the Middle East and North Africa. Europe's Islamophobia, as Edward Said has shown, dates back to the Middle Ages and the early part of the Renaissance, but it must be contextualized within the parameters of Orientalism as a modern discourse of power.

Insofar as Islam has been always seen as belonging to the Orient, its particular fate within the general structure of Orientalism has been to be looked at first of all as if it were one monolithic thing, and then with a very special hostility and fear.²⁶

Even a cursory glance at the title of journalistic articles about Muslim immigrants in Europe since 9/11 – for example, "Europe and Islam: Crescent Waxing, Cultures Clashing," "EuroIslam: The Jihad Within?" "A Growing Band of Brothers: Muslims in Europe," "Decline and Fall of the Christian Empire," and "Holy War in Europe"²⁷ – reveals both a monolithic vision of what Islam is and a profound antagonism toward Islam that is stereotyped as a violent and anti-democratic religion, one incompatible with Western culture and society. Such monolithic and stereotypical views of Islam dominate the themes of many recently published book-length manuscripts by so-called "experts" as well – e.g., Bruce Bawer's *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam Is Destroying the West from Within*; Claire Berlinski's *Menace in Europe: Why the Continent's Crisis Is America's, Too*; Milton Viorst's *Storm from the East: The Struggle Between the Arab World and the Christian West*; and Jytte Klausen's *The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe*. Although some of these books and aforementioned articles acknowledge in a cursory fashion that the vast majority of Muslim immigrants in Europe are secular, peaceful, and have been successfully assimilated into European societies, they nonetheless go on to depict them as belonging to a fanatical and violent community, blindly identifying with a supranational *umma* that aims to create a "Eurabia," according to one writer and the title of the cover story of a recent issue of *The Economist*.²⁸ Minor and marginalized

groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizb ut-tahrir (“Liberation Party”), and Tablighi Jamaat are often mentioned to make general and often unsubstantiated claims about the proliferation of Muslim colonies throughout European metropolises, colonies that are then portrayed to be vulnerable to radical Islam imported from the Middle East.

In these representations, the terrorist events of 9/11 are quickly associated with Muslims, in general, and with Muslim immigrants in Europe, in particular, as exemplified in this opening line of an article by Olivier Roy, a former research director at the prestigious Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris and currently a professor at European University Institute in Florence:

If there were any question as to whether Middle Eastern-born Muslim radicals could wreak massive destruction in Western countries, it was answered on September 11, 2001. An important related question, however, remains on the table. Could future Islamic terror arise from within Western societies, from Muslim radicals born in the West and thoroughly familiar with its ways?²⁹

The author goes on to describe a rather monolithic notion of Islam that is rapidly being transformed into a “universal” and radical faith. While in the first part of the above statement, Roy quickly and uncritically associates Islam, Middle Eastern people, and terrorism, in the second part his question intimates a further association between radical Islam and Muslim immigrants in Europe. In spite of his lack of training in Islamic jurisprudence, not to mention a solid grounding in the sociology of immigration in Europe, Roy is quick to generalize, constantly making pseudo-scientific claims about the ideological radicalization of Muslim youth in Europe who as neo-fundamentalist converts “provide fertile ground for recruiters to radical Islam” (63).

Roy’s representation of Muslim immigrants in Europe embodies a profound structure of disavowal that, while marginally acknowledging certain sociological and political facts, ultimately ignores their historical effects and cultural and political implications. For example, though Roy marginally acknowledges that “Most of the approximately 13 million Muslims living in EU countries are not politically radical,” he nonetheless goes on to warn his readers about the emergence of new Islamic radical youth movements in European cities, movements whose identification with a diasporic form of Islamic radicalism makes them potentially more threatening to Western civilization and democracy than Al-Qaeda itself (64). Moreover, even though Roy mentions in passing that the lower social and educational level of Muslim immigrants may play a part in their radicalization, his disavowing discourse devises a psychological explanation for the emergence of radical Islam, which ultimately blames Muslim immigrants themselves for their disenfranchisement by claiming that they are “fighting at the frontiers of their imaginary umma” (i.e., Western Europe) because “what most agitates them are the side effects from their own Westernization” (64). Roy never ponders about the history of European colonialism, nor does he consider the implications of the neo-industrial revolution in Western Europe after WWII to explain the sociological predicaments facing Muslim immigrants in Europe; instead he focuses on the ideological dimensions of “the evolution of EuroIslam” and the security threat it poses to Western democratic societies. It is worth noting in passing that Roy in his 2007 *Secularism Confronts Islam* argues that Muslim intellectuals are

leading the masses in the Islamic world so that they could live in a secularized world while remaining “true believers.”

That a sophisticated researcher at a prestigious institution would portray Muslim immigrants in such an Orientalist fashion speaks to a broad and problematic consensus about the linkage between Muslim immigration and Islamic radicalism in the media and among political analysts and the general public in Europe – a consensus built, ironically, under the banner of a universalist secularism underpinned by liberal views of human rights. Such a cultural and political consensus has a crucial role to play in the politico-legal realm where the laws of citizenship and residency are more concretely defined. States and national communities throughout the EU work in tandem to maintain a consensus about the crisis of Muslim immigration and the need to regulate and restrict it.³⁰ Today, the anti-immigrant sentiment is not just prevalent among the nationalist politicians on the right; in recent years anti-Muslim legislations have been championed and passed by centrist and leftist parties as well – e.g., the law banning Islamic headscarf in French schools in 2004, by British politicians in 2006, and by the Belgium government in 2010. While the figure of the (radical/delinquent) Muslim immigrant provides a signifier of backwardness and inferiority through which a civilized and enlightened European identity or citizenship is construed, the juridical and administrative regulation of immigration, produced in collaborative ways with the political and economic exigencies of each nation, enable the collective sovereignty of the European Union as a unified political and cultural community.³¹ The anti-immigrant Pasqua laws of France in 1993, which, as Mireille Rosello describes, turned “the *clandestine* (illegal immigrant) into an enemy of the state, the most easily identifiable national scapegoat” and the banning of headscarf in France beyond their repressive intentions, enable a sense of European collectivity through a differential mode of identification with the Muslim immigrant.³²

CONCLUSION

In *About Europe: Philosophical Hypotheses*, Denis Guénoun argues that “Europe configures itself facing Islam,” by which he means that Europe is able to define itself as a figure of the universal “in the confrontation with a determined and specific otherness, namely Islam’s.”³³ In claiming that “Islam is Europe’s other,” Guénoun aims “neither to consign Islam to an essential exteriority in relation to European history nor to exclude it from the definition of Europe as an alien outsider” (34). Rather, his goal is to “inscribe the relation with Islam into the heart and deepest place of the movement of identification of Europe as such” (34). Guénoun asserts:

Repressing Islam, for Europe, is repressing the gesture that forms it: it is repressing that which, from its birth onward, establishes Europe as the failure of its projected universality, the interruption and reversal of its process (of the universal as expansion, bringing on Europe) – repressing that which *Constitutes* it as a return and a retreat: its *very being itself*. (34)

Guénoun views Muslim immigration to Europe as the return of the repressed of colonialism: the “Arabo-Islamic” other comes back into the heart of Europe, making

it to reveal to itself “the initial exclusion that is the foundation of Europe, its primary repression” (53). My discussion of Europe’s disavowal of its colonial history and Orientalist perception of the Arabo-Islamic world is in accordance with Guénoun’s philosophical hypothesis. Although Guénoun does not offer any suggestion regarding how to reckon with this fundamental misalliance between Europe and Islam, I take his final observation that “Islam is not external to our [i.e., European] history” a step further (185). The road to a more harmonious relation between Europe and its Muslim immigrants, I wish to suggest, must go through the path of *anamnesia*, a radical form of remembering that requires Europeans to “first summon up the strength to remember [their immigration history] properly,” as Žižek would say.³⁴ By not working through its long history of immigration and its colonial underpinnings, Europe has exhibited a neurotic fixation on a particular aspect of Islamic identity that alienates its citizens from the present and prevents them from moving toward a more harmonious future with their Muslim compatriots. Rather than engaging such crucial and cogent issues as unemployment among the immigrant youths, or their alienating conditions on the literal margins of their society, or working through “the racial discourses that were elaborated and deployed with reference to both immigration and an essential exteriority in relation to European history nor to exclude it from the definition of Europe as an alien outsider,” Europeans have engaged in an ideological battle of good, secular citizens versus bad, religious, Muslim immigrants, sanctimoniously disavowing any responsibility for producing a disaffected or radicalized immigrant youth (Guénoun 34).

What is needed at this historical juncture is not a monumentalizing history, one that blindly glorifies and mystifies the virtues of Enlightenment liberalism that apparently Muslim immigrants fail to appreciate and embrace, but a more critically engaged historiography that works through past traumas and injustices by way of adjudicating or “properly” forgetting the past.³⁵ What Europeans need to reckon with is that when Muslim immigrants are not covered by the universality supposedly afforded to all Europeans, when their basic human rights are violated, when they are racially profiled, when they are subjected to permanent surveillance, and when they are detained for their religious and political beliefs, these acts hold up a mirror to European civilization, exposing the failures of its claims to universality, communitarianism, and human rights.

ENDNOTES

1. I wish to thank Adrienne Posner for her extremely helpful research assistance, David Kim and Jyotsna Singh for their invaluable comments on the first draft of this essay, and Robert Aguirre, Roger Rouse, Marian Aguiar, and Andreea Ritivoi for their thoughtful remarks when I presented this paper at Wayne State University and Carnegie Mellon University.
2. I use the word “immigrant” throughout my essay intentionally in order to draw attention to how the word itself has been historically denied in discussion of immigration in Western Europe where other words such as migrant, guest workers, refugees, foreigners, etc. are used to describe various immigrant communities by way of disavowing the immigrant texture of Europe since WWII for cultural, political, and economic reasons. The French, for example, refer to their immigrants as *étrangers*, just as the Germans have called their immigrants *gastarbeiter*s. Unlike in the United States where the nation has historically been defined in terms of its immigrant texture, immigrants in Europe are often treated as

- temporary guest workers or as perpetual foreigners, rarely acknowledging the fact that most of them do not have any intention of going back to their countries of origin.
3. Samuel Moyn, "From Communist to Muslim: European Human Rights, the Cold War, and Religious Liberty," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113.1 (2014): 63–86, 64.
 4. Jacques Derrida, "Step of Hospitality/No Hospitality." In Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*. Trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 77. Derrida also elaborates his notion of hospitality in his *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).
 5. The European notion of hospitality as a conditional form was first articulated by Immanuel Kant whose "Third Definitive Article of Perpetual Peace" posits that "The rights of men, as citizens of the world, shall be limited to the conditions of universal hospitality (*Gastfreundschaft*)" which means that "so long as he [the stranger or immigrant] conducts himself peaceably, he must not be treated as an enemy"; see Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay*, Trans. M. Campbell Smith (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1903), 137.
 6. Although a similar vacillation between xenophobia and xenophilia also characterizes the United States' relation with its new immigrant, the dynamics and politics of immigration is quite different; see my *A Forgetful Nation: On Immigration and Cultural Identity in the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
 7. Étienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?: Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, Trans. James Swenson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 8.
 8. Sigmund Freud, *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology*. Ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Collier, 1963), 213–214.
 9. Maxime Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism, and Citizenship in Modern France* (London: Routledge, 1992), 34. See also Balibar's "Sujets ou citoyens." *Les Temps Modernes* 452.3/4 (1984): 1726–1753.
 10. Elisa Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
 11. For an exemplary study of unemployment among Muslim communities, see Evi Collins and Nani Macharashvili, "Franco-Dutch Unemployment Among Muslim Minorities: A Comparison and Analysis of the System and Policies Affecting Muslim Minorities in the Netherlands and France," 2012. http://ies.tsu.edu.ge/data/file_db/Collins/Thesis%20Fr-Nl%20Evi%20Final%20Version%201.pdf
 12. "Inflammatory Language," *The Guardian*, November 8, 2005. <http://www.theguardian.com/news/blog/2005/nov/08/inflammatoryla>
 13. Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 13.
 14. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 2.
 15. Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 10.
 16. *Ibid.*, 10.
 17. As I elaborate below, contemporary European discourse of rescue has its origin in colonial era. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains in the context of the abolition of the Hindu rite of *sati* in British India, white, male colonizers employed a discourse of rescue to "save the brown woman from the brown man"; see her seminal essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Carry Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–316.
 18. Minoo Moalem, "Transnationalism, Feminism, and Fundamentalism." In *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, ed. Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, and Minoo Moallem (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 320–348, 338.

19. *The Guardian*, February 25, 2005, 23; for a more detailed analysis of the politics of the veil in France, see Pierre Tevanian, *Le voile médiatique: un faux débat: l'affaire du foulard islamique* (Paris: Editions Raison d'Agir, 2005).
20. *L'Événement du Jeudi*, November 9–15, 1989; quoted in Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation*, 113.
21. These remarks are made in a 2007 interview with Allison Roberts in the *London Evening Standard*. <http://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/london-life/ayaan-hirsi-ali-fgm-was-done-to-me-at-the-age-of-five-ten-years-later-even-20-i-would-not-have-testified-against-my-parents-8534299.html>
22. Hirsi Ali, *Infidel* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), 285–286.
23. BBC News Online, October 17, 2006.
24. <http://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/london-life/ayaan-hirsi-ali-fgm-was-done-to-me-at-the-age-of-five-ten-years-later-even-20-i-would-not-have-testified-against-my-parents-8534299.html>
25. *Newsday*, December 13, 2004, A20.
26. Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Expert Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 4.
27. These articles appear in order in the following publications: *The Washington Quarterly* (Summer 2004), *The National Interest* (Spring 2003), *The Economist* (April 2004), and *The Weekly Standard* (March 29, 2004).
28. March 3, 2007.
29. “Eurolslam: The Jihad Within?” *The National Interest* no. 71 (March 2003): 63–73, 63.
30. It is worth noting in passing how the contemporary response by Western powers to the threat posed by ISIS has strengthened this cultural and political consensus, as some of ISIS’s members are believed to come from south London, French *banlieues*, and other European neighborhoods where Muslim immigrants live.
31. Although the argument I am making about the productive function of the Muslim immigrant, as a differential other, in defining national identity is operative throughout Western Europe, it is particularly exemplary in the case of the French model of national-republican citizenship which, as Balibar, Scott, and others have pointed out, allows for, perhaps even requires, for its existence the singling out of differences between the French and their Muslim immigrants.
32. Mireille Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 1.
33. Denis Guénoun, *About Europe: Philosophical Hypotheses*. Trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 33.
34. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), 22.
35. My notion of “working through” here is based on Freud’s insight that repetition is a mechanism of repression through which “the patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out”; see Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through.” In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. James Strachey, vol. 12 (London: Hogarth, 1958), 150 (emphasis in original).

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

“ALWAYS ON TOP”? The “Responsibility to Protect” and the persistence of colonialism



*Jessica Whyte*¹

Every empire, however, tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, that its mission is not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate.²

—Edward Said

In light of history, it is difficult for representatives of developing countries to take at face value altruistic claims by the West.³

—International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty

“SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS”

In 2002, during the lead-up to the war on Iraq, Edward Said wrote a short review with the title “Always on Top,” in which he drew attention to a new sympathy for classical imperialism amongst contemporary intellectuals.⁴ In the wake of “years of degeneration following the white man’s departure,” Said argued, there was now less tolerance for the decolonizing “disorder and tyranny” instigated by anti-colonial leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba, and Gamal Abdel Nasser. Said observed that expressions of admiration for the capitalist development, security, and order supposedly enabled by colonial rule had become more prevalent, and, in the wake of the degeneration that followed decolonization, “the empires that ruled African and Asia didn’t seem quite as bad.”⁵ Said situated this revisionist account of empire in the wake of the collapse of anti-colonial movements and the Soviet Union, which had produced not the “end of history,” as Francis Fukuyama had maintained, but the end of “thinking about history in a consequential way.”⁶ It was time, according to this revisionist argument, for the people of former colonies to put colonialism behind them, to let the past be past, and to own up to their own responsibility for the postcolonial disorder and violence of their societies. In contrast, Said stressed the afterlife of colonialism and the continuing effort that was required to account for the extent of its effects on former colonies. “Who decides,” he asked, “when (and if) the influence of imperialism has ended?”⁷

Said’s challenge to revisionist historians of empire was not merely a debate about how best to characterize the past; rather, he stressed that the promulgation of a

benevolent account of the British empire, which obscured its foundational role in the constitution of Iraq, served to bolster contemporary arguments for another war in that country.⁸ The revisionist histories of empire, he argued, could not be separated from an appraisal of contemporary American imperial power as “enlightened and even altruistic.”⁹ It was such an appraisal that allowed liberal defenders of the war like Christopher Hitchens to hope that “if the United States will dare to declare out loud for empire” that this empire will be one which allows local populations to govern themselves.¹⁰ Today, more than a decade later, the liberal euphoria that sustained the Iraq War has largely dissipated in the face of ongoing conflict, and the Bush administration’s claims that the war would bring liberal democracy and freedom to the Iraqi people is treated with widespread cynicism, even amongst many of those who defended such claims at the time.¹¹ It could be assumed that the disastrous failures of the Iraq War would serve to jettison the civilizing claims of its defenders. And yet, as Karuna Mantena notes, the Bush administration’s ideological reconstitution of the Iraq War as a moral project was “given sustenance by a related set of debates about humanitarian intervention and human rights that likewise sought to inject an ethical framework into foreign policy considerations.”¹² In this chapter, I wish to examine the substitution of ideas of humanitarian intervention with the newer language of the “Responsibility to Protect,” and ask whether this newer language replicates the benevolent account of empire whose revival Said charts in “Always on Top.”

In what follows, I therefore consider the place of colonialism in the conceptual redefinition of sovereignty as *responsibility* that was pioneered by the South Sudanese diplomat Francis Deng, and his colleagues at the Brookings Institution. Beginning in 1989, the Africa Project at Brookings attempted to provide a new framework for thinking about conflict management in Africa. This attempt culminated in the 1996 book *Sovereignty as Responsibility: Conflict Management in Africa*, which redefined sovereignty not as authority over a territory, but as the responsibility to protect a population.¹³ Central to this conditional account of sovereignty was the argument that, if a state is unable or unwilling to provide this protection, it cannot claim a right to non-interference to prevent outsiders from securing the security and welfare of its population. Deng’s work exercised a great influence on international relations and was adopted by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) as the central plank of its “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) norm. On the surface, this account of sovereignty as responsibility could not be more different from the Bush administration’s messianic language in the period prior to the Iraq War. Defenders of the R2P consistently stress the need for strategies to prevent mass atrocities, rather than to respond after the fact; they highlight non-military forms of intervention, foreground the role of the domestic state in protecting its population, and rhetorically distance the new norm from the more grandiose liberal expansionism of earlier defenses of humanitarian intervention.¹⁴

Nonetheless, in this essay, I suggest that this new account of sovereignty, like the imperial revivalism identified by Said, is premised on the argument that it is time for post-independence states to put the experience of colonialism behind them: “several decades after independence,” Deng et al. write forcefully in *Sovereignty as Responsibility*, “it is becoming increasingly inappropriate to blame Africa’s problems on colonialism.”¹⁵ The Brookings fellows provide a narrative of decolonization designed to support this argument. Following independence, its authors argue, African states

pursued developmental, nation-building policies whose objectives included rapid growth, equitable redistribution, the development of infrastructure, and the provision of social services including free health and education. The implication of these objectives, they argue, “was to prove disastrous.”¹⁶ Politically, this developmental agenda led to the constitution of strong, centralized states that suppressed dissent and dismissed human rights as unaffordable luxuries, leading to authoritarianism and military government. Economically, this agenda fostered state planning and monopoly, economic mismanagement, “uncontrolled spending” and rising inequality, which in turn created more dissent, entrenching the need for further state repression.¹⁷ Such narrative has much in common with the accounts of the disorder of independence to which Said refers in “Always on Top,” which positioned themselves in the wake of what one critic of anti-colonialism termed the “long litany of bitterness, disappointment, and betrayal that has confounded the creed of Third Worldism.”¹⁸

As Said noted, this attack on Third Worldism led to a re-characterization of post-colonial disorder, poverty, and violence as “home-grown” problems for which colonial powers could not be held responsible.¹⁹ Responding to V.S. Naipaul’s injunction that it was time for Indians to stop blaming the British for everything, Said remarked cuttingly that such a view “hides the truly immense intellectual labor that is still required to understand how much the British really were responsible for.”²⁰ In a similar vein, this paper argues that the responsabilization of the post-independence state by the R2P norm obscures the labor necessary to reveal the continuing effects of the legacy of colonialism. To question the attribution of responsibility at stake in the “Responsibility to Protect” is not to perpetuate the colonial characterization of colonized, or formerly colonized, peoples as irresponsible and child-like, and so ill-equipped for self-government. Such was the argument of those imperial revivalists Said challenged in “Always on Top,” who accused people in the West who spoke of colonialism and imperialism of infantilizing the people of former colonies on the basis of a Western guilt complex.²¹ Rather, to question the neoliberal language of responsabilization is to acknowledge, as Kwame Nkrumah remarked bitterly soon after the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, that “a State in the grip of neo-colonialism is not master of its own destiny.”²² It is unquestionable, as Antony Anghie has stressed, “that Third World peoples suffer enormous hardships and difficulties, as a result, very often, of the corrupt and oppressive Third World state.”²³ What must be questioned, however, is the idea that poverty and political failure are “entirely indigenous” and therefore that they can, and must, be “corrected” from outside.²⁴ Such a questioning refuses to bracket the legacy of colonial rule, and the persistence forms of exploitation, coercive interventions, US-backed coups, and IMF structural adjustment programs, in explaining the current disorder and violence in those states now targeted for Western intervention.

In what follows, I suggest that the “responsibilization” of the postcolonial state brought about by the “Responsibility to Protect” concept is one facet of the revisionist imperial mood that Said identified in the wake of the demise of anti-colonialism. Central to this mood, as Said presented it, was the view that “the past was over, and the time had come for non-white people to own up to their self-inflicted wounds.”²⁵ My focus here is on the texts in which sovereignty was redefined as responsibility, particularly the work of Deng et al. in *Sovereignty as Responsibility*, the ICISS report, and the associated writings of ICISS members which served to rationalize the R2P.²⁶ In

what follows, I argue those who pioneered the R2P norm sought to banish the specter of colonialism by moving away from the language of a “right to intervene” towards the neoliberal language of “sovereignty as responsibility.” I then examine the narrative of the history of sovereignty that is offered to support this concept, and challenge the dominant account according to which international relations, until very recently, was characterized by the centrality of the norm of non-intervention. By re-situating colonialism at the heart of this story, it is possible to recognize that, for much of the world, intervention by external powers has been not the exception but the norm. I then turn to the recent attempt to conceptualize the fulfillment of the responsibility to protect as a new standard that determines the sovereign status of states. I suggest that, far from an enlightened move away from colonial forms of intervention, this represents a revival of the classical “standard of civilization,” which served to demarcate the community of “civilized states” from those non-sovereign territories that could be subjected to forms of colonial intervention and government. Finally, I suggest that the *responsibility* at stake in the R2P is better conceived as a form of neoliberal *responsibilization*, which allows Western states and international financial institutions to evade responsibility for the failures of previous forms of intervention, including those which sought to impose neoliberal economic restructuring.

“THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT”

The story of the Responsibility to Protect is told by its advocates against the backdrop of a twentieth century “marred by the Holocaust, the killing fields of Cambodia, the genocide in Rwanda and the mass killings in Srebrenica.”²⁷ It is thus located firmly “after evil,” in the wake of what a major UN Report on the R2P terms “the brutal legacy of the twentieth century.”²⁸ Notably, colonialism does not appear in this account of the previous century’s legacy of brutality. “We allow justly that the Holocaust has permanently altered the consciousness of our time,” Said writes in *Orientalism*, “why do we not accord the same epistemological mutation in what imperialism has done and what orientalism continues to do?”²⁹ In this case, the answer is clear: in evading the brutality of colonialism, defenders of the R2P construct the twentieth century as a salutary story of “the abomination that could occur when the Westphalian state was accorded unlimited sovereignty.”³⁰ This framing has generated a concern with restraining the actions of states *internally*, while serving to weaken the constraints on external intervention that decolonization had consolidated as central to the principle of sovereignty. The rallying call “never again” thus serves to stiffen the resolve to intervene, rather than to warn against repeating colonial patterns of intervention.

To the extent that the consciousness of imperialism and colonialism appears in the founding texts of the R2P, it is primarily as an *obstacle* to the further dissemination of the norm. Gareth Evans, who chaired the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), has noted that any attempt to gain consensus in the UN General Assembly was forced to face the resistance to “humanitarian intervention” on the part of leaders of decolonized states who were protective of their sovereignty and “saw the non-intervention norm as one of their few defenses against threats and pressures from more powerful international actors.”³¹ The task of those who formulated the R2P was to overcome the conflict between supporters of a so-called “right to intervene” and those Evans refers to as “developing world

sovereignty addicts” by redefining sovereignty instead of negating it. In formulating the R2P, ICISS sought to reassure those leaders who had reason to believe that the weakening of the principle of sovereignty may leave them exposed to unwelcome military interventions by more powerful states. “Intervening to protect human beings,” the ICISS report read, “must not be tainted by any suspicion that is [sic] a form of neo-colonial imperialism.”³²

In attempting to dispel this suspicion, ICISS moved away from the language of “the right to intervene,” adopting instead the language of the “Responsibility to Protect.” If, as Giorgio Agamben has noted, “terminological choices can never be neutral,” then this terminological shift was aimed at generating a political consensus that the bellicose interventionist tenor of the former term had made less likely.³³ As the ICISS report puts it, the language that pitted state sovereignty against a “right to intervene” is “outdated and unhelpful” as it focuses attention of the prerogatives of intervening states, focuses narrowly on military intervention, and serves to “to trump sovereignty with intervention” by labeling dissent as anti-humanitarian.³⁴ In his own book on the R2P, Evans outlines the problems with the old language in starker terms. In the North, he argues, the language of the right to intervene worked to rally people, while “in the rest of the world it enraged as many as it inspired.”³⁵ The problem, Evans stresses, is that the concept was too one-sided to acknowledge the anxiety of those states who had already found themselves subjected to the civilizing missions of the great powers. By speaking not of a “right to intervene” but of a “responsibility to protect” ICISS members sought to reassure these anxious states that the concept would not be simply a civilizing mission in another guise.

It was in the service of achieving a consensus that ICISS jettisoned the more strident anti-statist claims of liberal internationalism and turned to Deng’s pioneering redefinition of sovereignty to provide a blueprint for building what it termed “responsible sovereignty.” Central to this work of redefinition was the repeated assertion that the prime agent of such responsibility would remain the domestic state; “foreigners cannot do the job,” Deng et al. wrote. “Sovereignty is its own practice, and responsibility begins at home.”³⁶ Devoid of aspirations towards perpetual peace, the R2P presents itself as a pragmatic response to crises that aims to enhance, rather than diminish, the power of the state. Acknowledging that “even as the traditional concept of sovereignty erodes there is no presumptive, let alone adequate, replacement for the state,” defenders of the R2P portray their challenge as that of both reaffirming sovereignty, and redefining it in such a way that it is consistent with established standards of human dignity.³⁷

At first sight, it would seem that the attempt to reach a consensus between supporters and opponents of humanitarian intervention was remarkably successful: in 2005, after much behind-the-scenes lobbying, the concept was cited in the United Nations World Summit Outcome, which was unanimously adopted by all UN member states; in 2006 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1674 on the protection of civilians; and in 2011 the UN Security Council cited the responsibility to protect in Resolution 1973, which authorized “all necessary measures . . . to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.”³⁸ Although the Security Council also reaffirmed “its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya,” the ensuing NATO bombing campaign did not stop at the

protection of civilians, but led to the overthrow of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi, and ultimately to Gaddafi's murder. At the time of writing, two rival “governments” continue to battle for control, and the European Union is considering sending ground troops to stop the flow of migrants who risk their lives crossing the Mediterranean to escape the country's ongoing conflict.³⁹ Indeed, the post-intervention scenario in Libya looks less like a novel attempt to construct “responsible sovereignty” and more like the repetition of the “regime change” paradigm of the Iraq War.

If we take a longer view, the NATO intervention in Libya appears in a lineage of imperial rule that includes that country's incorporation into the Ottoman Empire during the mid-sixteenth century, and its more recent colonization by Italy, which demanded the right to send troops there, ostensibly to protect its Italian population. “A doctrine of intervention that both claims the moral high ground and clamors its universality but under which the interveners are always from the Global North and the intervened upon always from the Global South is not moral progress,” as David Rieff noted in the wake of the Libya intervention; “it is geopolitical business as usual.”⁴⁰ In the wake of what many critics saw as NATO's over-reach of its UN mandate, such parallels were clear enough to draw the ire even of defenders of the R2P like Thabo Mbeki, whose government had played an important role in garnering world support for the norm. “This is the same attitude as Westerners displayed during colonial times when they presided over our continent,” Mbeki wrote in the wake of the bombing campaign.⁴¹ Such a long view suggests that, far from marking a paradigm shift from sovereign non-intervention to recognition of sovereign responsibilities, intervention has not been the exception in international relations, but the norm.

“THE MEANING OF SOVEREIGNTY”

Under the heading “The Meaning of Sovereignty,” the ICISS report describes a sovereign state as one that is “empowered in international law to exercise exclusive and total jurisdiction within its territorial borders.”⁴² In the second half of the twentieth century, the report suggests, this norm of non-intervention was challenged by “a new focus on human rights and, more recently, human security, emphasizing the *limits* of sovereignty.”⁴³ ICISS positions this new limited sovereignty in the context of what it argues is the shift from “a culture of sovereign impunity to a culture of national and international accountability” that has accompanied the promulgation of universal human rights standards like the UDHR.⁴⁴ According to this picture, the international community has emerged from the horrors of the twentieth century less willing to tolerate the abuses of states in the name of non-intervention. Today, the report goes on to say, sovereigns do not just have the right to control their territories – they also have responsibilities, and they will be held accountable when they fail to fulfill them. Evans portrays this as a break with established precedent – even a breakthrough. Nonetheless, the ICISS chief opined in a 2006 lecture: “old habits of non-intervention die very hard.”⁴⁵

Evans does not ask *for whom* non-intervention was the norm in international relations; rather, he repeats the standard narrative according to which sovereignty was institutionalized in Europe with the 1648 Peace of Westphalia then universalized in the twentieth century. According to this standard account, Westphalian sovereignty,

defined by the centrality of the norm of non-intervention, remained largely intact until the development of the idea of humanitarian intervention and the normative innovation that led to the reconceptualization of sovereignty as responsibility.⁴⁶ Central to such accounts is the assumption that it is intervention that is novel and aberrant in a world of sovereign states – that is, in the words of ICISS member Ramesh Thakur, that “for 350 years – from the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 until 1998 – sovereignty functioned as institutionalised indifference.”⁴⁷ Such a perspective, however, subtly elides the fact that for most of that 350-year period, much of the world was deprived of the sovereign status that emerged in Europe in the wake of the Thirty Years War. In his genealogy of the modern state, Michel Foucault notes in passing that the formation of the sovereign state in the wake of the Peace of Westphalia took place against the background of a historical reality marked by “the discovery of America [and] the constitution of colonial empires.”⁴⁸ In reality, the construction of empires was not merely the “background” to Westphalian sovereignty; rather, the equality of European states was premised on the existence of the so-called “vast free spaces” outside Europe whose freedom consisted in their removal from the laws of war, and their openness for European occupation and exploitation.⁴⁹ The very possibility of “Westphalian sovereignty” was thus constituted by the exclusion of much of the world from this sovereign status.

In *Sovereignty as Responsibility*, Deng et al. implicitly recognize this point when they portray both the peace of Westphalia and the 1885 Berlin Conference, “which carved up Africa into European colonial territories,” as premised on the interests of European powers in ensuring domestic stability in territorially defined states. Through the creation of territorially defined states, they argue, in a remarkably sanitized account of the “scramble for Africa,” the European powers “hoped to facilitate peaceful political and commercial relations among the principal actors in the European-centered international system.”⁵⁰ These “peaceful,” commercial relations between European states were premised on casting much of the world as devoid of legal personality and open to European exploitation. Colonialism was not simply the outside of the sovereign European state – rather, the principle of sovereignty was profoundly shaped by the colonial encounter.⁵¹ For the authors of *Sovereignty as Responsibility*, this past generates a present demand for benevolent action on the part of the “international community”: “just as the international community was a factor in drawing the colonial borders,” they write, “it should be involved in reconsidering those borders, with higher objectives in mind than were behind the colonial demarcation of African state borders.”⁵² For Deng et al., the involvement of the “international community through the United Nations” should “remove or at least minimize the colonial connotation.”⁵³ This implicit assumption that the “international community” is synonymous with the colonial powers that oversaw the scramble for Africa may tell us more about the constitution of this “community” than defenders of the R2P may have wished.

According to the ICISS report, following “decolonization, what had been a restrictive and Eurocentric (that is, Western) order became global.”⁵⁴ Although such an account recognizes the European origins of sovereignty, it does not acknowledge the extent to which colonialism was a constitutive aspect of Westphalian sovereignty.⁵⁵ In the wake of decolonization, the ICISS report argues, “[t]here were no longer ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ because virtually every person on Earth lived within a sovereign

state.”⁵⁶ Here, there is an implicit acknowledgement that, prior to the twentieth century, much of the world was deprived of sovereign status, and the protection from foreign intervention that it granted. Yet, there is a crucial, unresolved tension in the characterization of decolonization offered by the ICISS report. On the one hand, sovereignty is conceived as having been perfected in Europe before being applied to the world in a universalizing gesture that redeemed the concept by cleansing it of its prior Eurocentrism. On the other, the consequence of this extension of sovereignty, and its embrace by the leaders of new sovereign states, are portrayed as a blow to the consolidation of norms of international responsibility.⁵⁷ The large increase in UN membership in the wake of decolonization, and the creation of new states proud of their identities and conscious of their fragility, Evans argued at a 2006 symposium, was “extremely inhibiting” to the development of an international responsibility to respond to internal human rights violations.⁵⁸

It is true that the end of formal colonialism saw many postcolonial states pursue nation-building developmental agendas, epitomized by Nkrumah’s slogan: “Seek ye first the political kingdom and everything else shall be added unto you.”⁵⁹ Seeking first the political kingdom, as Samuel Moyn has noted, implied the construction of independent states, rather than the protection of the individual from the state. Anti-colonialism, as Samuel Moyn puts it, was thus the greatest force for the *dissemination* of sovereignty rather than for its qualification.⁶⁰ Noting that “respect for state sovereignty is the preemptive norm par excellence of ex-colonial states,” the ICISS report acknowledges the legacy of colonialism only as a barrier that needs to be relegated to the past in order to facilitate the extension of the R2P. The ICISS background report acknowledges that what appears as “narrow legalism,” for instance the insistence on Security Council approval of interventions, “often appears in the South as a necessary buttress against new forms of imperialism.”⁶¹ Nonetheless, it suggests, “from many quarters the view is emerging that sovereignty is no longer sacrosanct.”⁶² To describe the insistence on UN Security Council authorization of force as “narrow legalism” reflects the dismissive attitude of the R2P’s defenders to a key aspect of the international order that was designed as what Anne Orford terms a “bulwark against the return of imperialism, and founded on a commitment to sovereign equality.”⁶³ The insistence of postcolonial states on curbing interventionism on the part of the most powerful states reflects the extent to which such intervention has been a distressingly constant feature of international relations.⁶⁴ By portraying the R2P concept as a break with previous norms of non-intervention, the ICISS report obscures both continuities with older forms of colonial intervention and the more recent forms of intervention into non-European societies.

The great strength of postcolonial theory lies in its capacity to reveal such forms of continuity by resituating colonialism at the heart of the narrative of sovereignty and intervention. Postcolonialism, Stuart Hall argues, does not mark a temporal rupture with colonialism but instead provides an alternate narrative in which colonialism appears as a constitutive feature of “European” modernity.⁶⁵ From this perspective, colonialism appears not as a “local or marginal sub-plot in some larger story” (the transition from feudalism to capitalism, modernization, etc.) but as “a major, extended and ruptural world-historical event.”⁶⁶ Postcolonialism, according to this characterization, disrupts the “whole grand historiographical narrative” which made colonialism subordinate to a narrative of capitalist modernity that could be told from

within European parameters.⁶⁷ At its best, then, postcolonial criticism could destabilize the narrative of the development of sovereignty offered by the founding R2P texts, and highlight the fact that colonialism was far from a “sub-plot” in the story of the development of Westphalian sovereignty. Decentering this European parameter would reveal that, for much of the world, non-intervention in internal affairs was never the norm. The Westphalian sovereignty that Evans bemoans was restricted to those states that recognized each other as “civilized.” In what follows, I examine the role of the classical “standard of civilization” in drawing the borders demarcating the community of “civilized states” from their non-sovereign outside, and suggest that the R2P can be seen as a reiteration of this attempt to develop standards against which the “non-civilized” will be found wanting.

SOVEREIGNTY AND THE “STANDARD OF CIVILIZATION”

“Sovereignty as responsibility,” as defined by Deng et al., “means that national governments are duty-bound to ensure minimal standards of security and social welfare for their citizens and be accountable both to the national body politic and the international community.”⁶⁸ While those who have articulated the R2P concept largely avoid the language of a “standard of civilization,” the concept sets out both economic and political criteria for recognition as a member of the society of states that starkly resemble those of the classical standard of civilization. According to the ICISS report, “Sovereignty as responsibility has become the minimum content of good international citizenship.”⁶⁹ Human rights play a crucial role in this new account of good international citizenship. “Respect for human rights,” the UN Report “Implementing the Responsibility to Protect” stresses, “. . . is an essential element of responsible sovereignty.”⁷⁰ Moreover, responsible sovereignty must “ensure for citizens peace, security, and stability through a system of law and order that enjoys broad-based support and therefore legitimacy.”⁷¹ New approaches to sovereignty, the ICISS background report suggests, are replacing the absolute rights of states with new forms of governance “based on international standards of democracy and human rights.”⁷²

Without refuting the claim, the ICISS background report notes that for some critics: “Human rights are the contemporary Western values being imposed in place of Christianity and the ‘standard of civilization’ in the 19th and early 20th century.”⁷³ Throughout the nineteenth century, the language of civilization (itself a transmutation of the language of race) was central to demarcating sovereign states from those societies deemed incapable of self-government and so lacking in legal personality. Prior to the contemporary debates about the responsibilities of states, good international citizenship was conceived according to the classical “standard of civilization,” which held out the possibility that independent, non-colonized states like Japan and Siam (now Thailand) could be admitted “as proper members of the family of nations” if they met certain requirements, which amounted to “idealized European standards” in both internal and external relations.⁷⁴ A civilized state, accordingly, was one in which “people of a European race,” as the nineteenth century legal scholar John Westlake put it, “may carry on the complex life to which they have been accustomed in their homes.”⁷⁵ In order to secure this, a state seeking to be recognized as civilized was required to reform its legal, political, and economic systems, to bring it into line

European standards. This standard aimed to answer the philosophical question of which states deserved recognition and legal personality under international law.⁷⁶

It was not until after WWII that the standard of civilization lost its hold on international relations, and, following decolonization, newly sovereign states “met attempts to hold them to behavioral standards with charges of neo-colonialism.”⁷⁷ For critics of the postcolonial focus on self-determination and non-intervention, these charges of neocolonialism were the guise under which “considerations of justice were . . . banished from decisions on membership in international society.”⁷⁸ The concept of sovereignty that emerged from decolonization, according to its critics, was “a concept of unconditional sovereignty; sovereignty without responsibility,”⁷⁹ and a “Hobbesian uncivilized state of nature.”⁸⁰ Symptomatic here is the human rights theorist Jack Donnelly, who argues that with the assault on the teleology of the standard of civilization the attempt to “raise all states to a higher level” was superseded by the view that self-determination entailed “accepting the lowest common denominator of sovereign equality.”⁸¹ The problem with extending sovereign equality to decolonized states, Donnelly argues, was that as soon as “the whole globe was recognized as civilized,” civilization lost any substantive meaning, and even “the Idi Amins, the Macias Nguemas, the Mobutos, the Maos, the Sukharnos and the Pinochets of the world” were recognized as civilized.⁸² Donnelly provides no argument for why these new states were morally worse, or less “civilized,” than the former European colonial powers who had previously ruled over many of the territories they now terrorized, or indeed, any account of the grounds on which Mobuto and Pinochet would be self-evidently added to the list of the uncivilized, while their sponsor, the United States, escaped such a list. In this, he is typical of much of the literature the R2P, which allows the West to *evade* responsibility for its previous crimes and its role in the failures of former colonies.

For these critics, the contemporary rise of human rights norms and the redefinition of sovereignty as responsibility can be seen as a progressive, new iteration of all that was best about the classical standard of civilization, as they resurrect substantive criteria of “just, humane, and civilized behavior” by which a state could be recognized as a member of the international society.⁸³ In contrast to a “pristine sovereignty” which would condemn millions to neglect and abuse, he argues that human rights provide a standard by which states can be judged – and that this represents “moral progress.”⁸⁴ According to Donnelly, “the attractive side of the classical standard of civilization” was that membership in what we now call the “international community” was reserved for those who fulfilled certain moral criteria, amongst them outlawing “shockingly uncivilized practices” such as slavery, piracy, and polygamy, and protecting freedom of commerce.⁸⁵ While he recognizes that the Opium Wars and the “brutal colonial penetration of Africa” provide “tragic examples of non-Western people being forced to endure the most savage barbarities in the name of superior civilization,” this does not prevent Donnelly, for instance, from celebrating the emergence of universal human rights as a new standard of civilization through which these same Western nations now hold others to account.⁸⁶ Here, as Said noted of those who criticized the Iraqi regime in the name of human rights, we see not a universalist critique of nationalism and statism but rather the revival of an old nationalist idea that “has given itself an internationalized and normative identity with authority and hegemony to adjudicate the relative values of human rights.”⁸⁷

ECONOMIC RESPONSIBILITIES

Responsible sovereignty is conceived not only in political terms, but also in economic terms. As ICISS member Michael Ignatieff makes clear, “effective sovereignty . . . is the precondition for any kind of successful entry into the world economy.”⁸⁸ In this respect, it is aligned with the classical standard of civilization, which emerged as trading companies, which had previously concerned themselves only with exploitation, began to intervene more directly into the governance of the territories in which they operated, with the goal of securing their trading interests. “Civilization” was not only legal and political but was also economic. Indeed, these elements came together in the privileging of the capacity to enter into binding contracts in ascertaining whether a state should be admitted to the family of nations.⁸⁹ Today, the responsible state is conceived as one that is responsive to the needs of the private sector and pursues economic policies dictated by the global financial institutions and major donor nations. That this responsibility is framed in the language of “development” and “good governance,” rather than “civilization,” does not mean that it is free of the paternalism and the racial hierarchies that typified the earlier standard of civilization. Rather, as Antony Anghie suggests, when international law discards a language that begins to appear racist and adopts a new vocabulary “that appears neutral and universal because it is based on economics and on expression of scientific fact rather than on an assertion of cultural superiority,” the uncivilized are reframed as the economically backward.⁹⁰ Thus, although the science of economic development replaces the science of racial superiority, the fundamental premise remains the same: certain people are not fit for self-government, and so need to be guided by the more “advanced” or “developed” powers.

If private sector investment, foreign aid, and structural adjustment have been matched by dramatic worsening of both equality and overall poverty, this is taken as evidence that “bureaucratic inertia” and a lack of good governance have hampered the success of externally driven economic restructuring. Moreover, commentators complain of lack of political will, and note that “[c]ontinuing indiscipline means liberalizing decrees are not actually implemented.”⁹¹ To overcome these perceived problems, Deng et al. suggest that donor conditionality should focus explicitly on good governance “defined broadly to encompass state and society as well as the economic requirements for effective management of conflict.”⁹² Even as states are stripped of any capacity to determine their own priorities, or to control their own economies, they are held responsible for economic failures:

The primary responsibility for economic and social development lies with Governments, which must create a conducive environment for vigorous private-sector led growth and aid effectiveness by pursuing sound economic policies, building effective responsible institutions and investing in public and social services that will reach all of their people.⁹³

Starkly absent from the R2P literature is any serious account of the failures of neoliberal restructuring in Africa or of the role of the International Financial Institutions in dismantling previous investments in public and social services.

Beginning in the 1980s, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), which dictated deeply unpopular economic

policies including the slashing of public spending, public sector retrenchments, the abolition of subsidies and price controls on staple foods and wage compression. Such policies reduced the ability of the state to formulate its own policies or respond to the demands of its citizens, and thus tended to encourage authoritarian and repressive forms of rule.⁹⁴ As Achille Mbembe notes of the African postcolony, “the crumbling of African states’ independence and sovereignty and the surreptitious placing of these states under the tutelage of international creditors” has brought with it the invention of new forms of coercion and exploitation.⁹⁵ Moreover, they led to the “dramatic reduction in the living standard of people” across the African continent.⁹⁶ The resistance to externally imposed economic restructuring has therefore not just come from states. Rather, the primary resistance has been from those people whose conditions of life are most threatened by it.

While the R2P literature consistently affirms the centrality of the state, the post-colonial state no longer appears as the guardian of the self-determination of its people, if it ever did, but as a “regulatory barrier between Western domination of the international order and the instability caused by the inequalities perpetuated through its reproduction.”⁹⁷ Thus, redefining sovereignty as responsibility provided a way to re-imagine the postcolonial state as an agent of stabilization that manages its population in the interests of a global, neoliberal order. “States are still the front-line responders to today’s threats . . .” reads a key UN report. “It follows that greater effort must be made to enhance the capacity of States to exercise their sovereignty responsibility.”⁹⁸ This language of “front-line responders,” which tends to portray the state as a police force, is not coincidental. States, according to ICISS and to Deng et al., must be sufficiently strong to police internal conflicts and pacify their populations. As Deng et al. frame it, *Sovereignty as Responsibility* is concerned with “government hired to serve as allocator, judge, and policeman over a jostling crowd of petitioning groups.”⁹⁹ Central to the role of the state, in this framing, is overcoming what they see as one of the major defects of independence movements: their tendency to *raise expectations*, especially amongst the urban population.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the people must be disciplined to accept a neoliberal economic agenda, and states must be disciplined to exercise their sovereignty within a field of clearly demarcated political and economic options. The dream of responsible sovereignty is one in which post-independence states will be held responsible for their failures, while those who established the rules of the game these states are forced to play will evade responsibility, and thus remain, in Said’s words, “always on top.”

ENDNOTES

1. My thanks to David Kim, Jyotsna Singh, and Ihab Shalbak for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.
2. Edward Said, “Blind Imperial Arrogance.” *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 2003. <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/jul/20/opinion/oe-said20>
3. International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), *The Responsibility to Protect: Research, Bibliography, Background* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001), 9.
4. Said was reviewing Catherine Hall’s book *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830–67*. See Edward Said, “Always on Top.” *London Review of Books* 25.6 (2002): n.p. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v25/no6/eward-said/always-on-top>

5. Said, "Always on Top," n.p.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Cited in Richard Seymour, *The Liberal Defense of Murder* (London: Verso, 2008), 9.
11. See Seymour, *The Liberal Defense of Murder* for an account of the recapitulations of various liberal defenders of the Iraq War.
12. Karuna Mantena, *Alibis for Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 179.
13. Francis M. Deng, Sadikiel Kimaro, Terrence Lyons, Donald Rothchild, and I. William Zartmann, *Sovereignty as Responsibility: Conflict Management in Africa* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1996).
14. ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect*.
15. Deng et al., *Sovereignty as Responsibility*, 24.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Pascal Bruckner, *The Tears of the White Man* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 37.
19. Said, "Always on Top," n.p.
20. Ibid.
21. Bruckner, *The Tears of the White Man*, 133.
22. Kwame Nkrumah, *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, 1965. <https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/nkrumah/neo-colonialism/introduction.htm>.
23. Antony Anghie, "Civilization and Commerce: The Concept of Governance in Historical Perspective." *Villanova Law Review* 45 (2000): 911.
24. Ibid.
25. Said, "Always on Top," n.p.
26. Anne Orford has argued that the R2P can best be viewed not as a norm that must be put into practice, but as a rationalization of pre-existing *practices* of international government. Orford provides a crucial genealogy of the emergence of such practices in *International Authority and the Responsibility to Protect* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Here, I am interested in interrogating what Charlotte Epstein has characterized as "the neglect of the role of power in shaping ideational international orders," which I see as a key weakness of much of the enthusiasm for the R2P. See Charlotte Epstein, "The Postcolonial Perspective: An Introduction." *International Theory* 6.2 (2014): 301.
27. United Nations Secretary General, "Implementing the Responsibility to Protect." (2009): 5.
28. Robert Meister, *After Evil: A Politics of Human Rights* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
29. Edward Said, "Preface." In *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), xvi–xvii.
30. Michael Ignatieff, *Human Rights as Politics and as Idolatry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4.
31. Gareth Evans, "From Humanitarian Intervention to the Responsibility to Protect." *Wisconsin International Law Journal* 24.3 (2006): 102.
32. ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect*, 45.
33. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 4.
34. ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect*, 16.
35. Gareth Evans, *The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and for All* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 33.
36. Deng et al., *Sovereignty as Responsibility*, 57.
37. Ibid., xi.

38. United Nations Security Council, “Resolution 1973 (2011).” http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_03/20110927_110311-UNSCR-1973.pdf
39. Ian Traynor, “Migrant Crisis: EU Plan to Strike Libya Networks Could Include Ground Forces.” *The Guardian*, May 14, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/13/migrant-crisis-eu-plan-to-strike-libya-networks-could-include-ground-forces>
40. David Rieff, “R2P, RIP.” *New York Times*, November 7, 2011. <http://home.sogang.ac.kr/sites/jaechun/courses/Lists/b6/Attachments/10/R2P,%20R.I.P.%20-%20NYTimes.com.pdf>
41. Thabo Mbeki, cited in Mathias Dembinski and Theresa Reinold, “Libya and the Responsibility to Protect – African and European Perspectives.” *Peace Research Institute* (PRIF), 24, note 29. <http://www.peacepalacelibrary.nl/ebooks/files/369284305.pdf>
42. ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect*, 12.
43. Evans, “From Humanitarian Intervention,” n.p.
44. ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect*, 14.
45. Evans, “From Humanitarian Intervention,” n.p.
46. For a challenge to this standard view, which stresses the precedents for intervention and sovereign responsibility, see Luke Glanville, “The Antecedents of Sovereignty as Responsibility.” *European Journal of International Relations* 17.233 (2011): 233–255.
47. Ramesh Thakur, “Libya, the First Stand or the Last Post for the Responsibility to Protect?” *E-International Relations*, March 13, 2011. <http://www.e-ir.info/2011/03/13/libya-the-first-stand-or-the-last-post-for-the-responsibility-to-protect/>
48. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 295.
49. Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth* (New York: Telos Publishing, 2006), 140.
50. Deng et al., *Sovereignty as Responsibility*, xv.
51. See Glanville, who argues that the “rules of sovereignty were very much shaped by the colonial encounter”; “The Antecedents of Sovereignty as Responsibility,” 244.
52. Deng et al., *Sovereignty as Responsibility*, 215.
53. Ibid.
54. ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect*, 6.
55. Ibid., 910.
56. Ibid., 6.
57. Glanville refers to post-colonial sovereignty as “a concept of unconditional sovereignty; sovereignty without responsibility.” Glanville, “The Antecedents of Sovereignty as Responsibility,” 247.
58. Evans, “From Humanitarian Intervention,” n.p. It was only with the end of the Cold War, Evans suggests, that this inhibition began to break down. The first Gulf War, he argues, was an early example of the international system working as it should in the face of aggression.
59. In Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 91.
60. Samuel Moyn, “Imperialism, Self-Determination, and the Rise of Human Rights.” In *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History*, ed. Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde, and William I. Hitchcock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
61. ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect*, 9.
62. Ibid.
63. Anne Orford, *International Authority and the Responsibility to Protect* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 166.
64. Although in some cases, even the justifications offered suggest continuity rather than discontinuity. When British General Stanley Maude captured Baghdad in 1917, he announced “our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators.” He assured the Iraqi people “whose commercial prosperity and whose safety

- from oppression and invasion must ever be a matter of the closest concern to the British Government,” that it should not be assumed that “it is the wish of the British Government to impose upon you alien institutions.” Stanley Maude, “Proclamation of Baghdad.” *Global Policy Forum*, March 11, 1917. <https://www.globalpolicy.org/iraq-conflict-the-historical-background-/british-colonialism-and-repression-in-iraq/48112.html>
65. Stuart Hall, “When Was the Post-Colonial?” In *The Post-Colonial Question*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 249.
 66. Ibid.
 67. Ibid.
 68. Deng et al., *Sovereignty as Responsibility*, 211.
 69. ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect*, 88.
 70. UN General Assembly, *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect: Report of the Secretary-General*, 12 January 2009, A/63/677, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4989924d2.html>, p.10.
 71. Deng et al., *Sovereignty as Responsibility*, 212.
 72. ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect*, 11.
 73. Ibid.
 74. Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 67.
 75. See *ibid.*, 85.
 76. Gerrit Gong, *The ‘Standard of Civilization’ in International Society* (Oxford: Clarindon Press, 1984), 24.
 77. Jack Donnelly, “Human Rights: A New Standard of Civilization?” *International Affairs* 74.1 (1998), 13.
 78. Ibid.
 79. Glanville, “The Antecedents of Sovereignty as Responsibility,” 247.
 80. Donnelly, “Human Rights,” 14.
 81. Ibid., 13.
 82. Ibid.
 83. Ibid., 21.
 84. Ibid., 20.
 85. Ibid., 5.
 86. Ibid.
 87. Edward Said, “Nationalism, Human Rights and Interpretation.” *Raritan* 12.3 (1993): 26–52.
 88. Michael Ignatieff, “Intervention and State Failure.” *Dissent*, Winter 2002. <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/intervention-and-state-failure>
 89. Brett Bowden and Leonard Seabrooke, eds., *Global Standards of Market Civilization* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.
 90. Anghie, *Imperialism*, 189.
 91. Richard Jeffries, “The State, Structural Adjustment and Good Government in Africa.” *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 31.1 (1993): 25.
 92. Deng et al., *Sovereignty as Responsibility*, 127.
 93. UN General Assembly, *Note [Transmitting Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, Entitled “A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility”]*, 2 December 2004, A/59/565, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/47fdfb22d.html>, 27.
 94. Bonnie Ibhawoh notes that in “urging African regimes to show courage and commit in the face of local opposition, IFI’s [International Financial Institutions] and donor agencies set the tone of authoritarianism in the implementation of adjustment policies.” Bonnie Ibhawoh, “Structural Adjustment, Authoritarianism and Human Rights in Africa.” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 19.1 (1999): 160.

95. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 93.
96. Ibhawoh, “Structural Adjustment,” 159.
97. David Chandler, “Why the Bombing of Libya Cannot Herald a Return to the 1990s Era of Humanitarian Intervention.” *Monthly Review*, April 2011. <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2011/chandler190411.html>
98. The United Nations Secretary General’s High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, “A More Secure World,” 18.
99. Deng et al., *Sovereignty as Responsibility*, 49.
100. Ibid.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

DRUG DETENTION AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN POST-*DOI MOI* VIETNAM



Claire Edington

INTRODUCTION

In September 2011, Human Rights Watch released a report detailing human rights abuses in drug detention centers in Southern Vietnam. Entitled “The Rehab Archipelago,” the report provided an overview of government policies toward drug use while also documenting the conditions inside detention centers based on interviews with recently released individuals.¹ From the investigation emerged a bleak picture of the experience of drug incarceration in Vietnam, marked by the long-term and arbitrary nature of detention in addition to forced detoxification and compulsory labor.² The report condemned these practices as clearly at odds with internationally recognized principles of human rights and public health evidence and urged for the immediate closure of the centers. The report appeared, even as drug detention centers – “06 centers,” as they are called locally – continued to proliferate in Vietnam, expanding from 56 centers in 2000 to 84 in 2006 to 109 in 2009, in addition to 19 privately owned facilities.³ As of 2013, 126 detention centers operated in Vietnam.⁴ This carceral network is not limited to Vietnam. Similar institutions are found throughout the region including China, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Malaysia, and Thailand. According to official reports, as of October 2012, there were 235,000 people detained in over 1,000 drug detention centers across East and Southeast Asia.⁵

The Human Rights Watch report traces the origins of Vietnam’s drug detention centers to the end of the U.S.–Vietnam War in 1975 when drug users, sex workers, and political dissidents were detained in state-run re-education camps. The report reads: “Key components of the approach to drug dependency treatment at the time are still in place. But it would be wrong to view drug detention centers as simply a remnant of earlier Communist ideology in resolving social issues.” In historical terms, then, how should we view the growing network of drug detention centers? And what does it tell us about the postcolonial world in Vietnam today? In this chapter, I argue that we should view drug detention in Vietnam not as a relic of an older system, but as a phenomenon that possesses at once deep historical origins, and that has emerged in response to the deep social and political challenges confronting the post-*doi moi* Vietnamese state. I focus on drug policy in the post-*doi moi* era as a way to frame the

dilemmas the Vietnamese state has faced in navigating social changes at home amidst increasing global market integration, the emergence of the twin epidemics of drug abuse and HIV, and pressures from international organizations to shift the national policy agenda in line with global (albeit contested) norms around public health and human rights. Rather than understand Vietnam's current approach to drug users as a reflection of a particular set of either Communist or "Asian values," often portrayed in the literature as static and coherent ideologies, defined in their opposition to Western conceptions of human rights, my aim is to show how discourses and state policies around drug use in Vietnam have evolved historically as part of a global dialogue with external actors.

Illicit drugs have long framed Vietnam's relationship with the West. In the early nineteenth century, British traders expanded opium cultivation from southern China and Burma into the north of Vietnam.⁶ In 1898, the newly installed colonial government in French Indochina (what is now Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) instituted a monopoly regulating the production and sale of opium. In addition to salt and alcohol, the opium monopoly was one of the three pillars on which the financing of the French colonial state was based. By 1900, tax on opium had accounted for more than half of all state revenues. In 1930, the territory possessed 3,500 licensed opium dens, or one for every 1,500 adult males. The cities of Hanoi, Hue, and Saigon had large opium smoking populations primarily of the Chinese merchant class, but drug addiction also began to filter down from the elite class to poor day laborers.⁷ Drugs, in general, and opium, in particular, came to serve as powerful symbols of Western intervention and oppression. In Vietnam's Declaration of Independence, delivered at Ba Dinh Square in Hanoi on 25 September 1945, Ho Chi Minh likened the opium monopoly to the systematic poisoning of the Vietnamese people, claiming that the French colonialists, "acting against principles of humanity and justice [. . .] had forced the use of opium (and alcohol) on the people to weaken our race."⁸

After 1945, the Vietnamese government aggressively sought to restrict the production and consumption of illicit drugs. Opium smoking was banned in the North by the new Communist government because the practice was considered incompatible with the new Vietnam's "socialist lifestyle." Later, at the end of the war in 1975 and the subsequent reunification of the country in 1976, Vietnamese leaders made claims similar to those following the French departure, defining drug use as a vestige of an inglorious past. Since drugs were regarded chiefly in terms of imperialist power and associated with the political servitude of the *ancien régime*, its continued existence was deemed impossible in the new society; individual drug use simply could not be considered as anything but isolated cases of personal corruption linked to a lingering past or external contamination.⁹ After 1975, the Communist government introduced measures to ban drug use and it sent many drug users to rehabilitation camps in order to help rid them of the bad remnants of capitalism.¹⁰

The harsh measures and overtly political messages that have characterized the state's response to drug use mean that drugs hold a deep cultural valence in Vietnamese society. Addiction is seen as a moral failure of individuals and the basis for social exclusion. Because of the intense stigma attached to drug use, the rehabilitation of drug users is invested with medical treatments and moral connotations that are inseparable. While the Human Rights Watch report traces the use of labor in drug detention centers as a typically Communist approach to rehabilitation from the

1970s, the practice actually forms part of a long-standing approach to social deviance in the region that dates back to French colonial rule. The introduction of agricultural colonies for the mentally ill and juvenile delinquents in French Indochina was part of a global movement in the early twentieth century that valorized the countryside as a site of rejuvenation and was geared as much toward affecting a “cure” as it was preparing individuals for re-entry into normalized social life. That the reliance on this form of rehabilitation remained resilient through ideological shifts with the victory of the Communists in the 1970s and again with the turn to global capitalism during the *doi moi* economic reforms of the 1980s reflects the durability and flexibility of beliefs in the social harms of drug use and the therapeutic value of work. Today, the goals of rehabilitation remain more or less the same, engendering a productive class of laborers who adhere to social norms, however defined, but the political stakes and rationalization for the rehabilitation of drug users have shifted dramatically.

DOI MOI

In 1986, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam inaugurated a series of economic reforms known as *doi moi* or “the renovation” and it shifted the country from a centrally planned to a “socialist market” economy. This included the commercialization of many state industries, as well as the emergence of the private sector and the opening of the country’s borders to foreign investment. Vietnam became a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1995 and it went on to join the World Trade Organization in 2007, cementing the country’s status as a “tiger economy” in the region. Vietnam has since witnessed tremendous progress across a host of socio-economic development measures. Van T. Nguyen and Maria Scannapieco write:

Life expectancy has increased to 71 years from 65 years and adult literacy has been maintained at over 91%. During the past 15 years, poverty levels in Vietnam have dropped from approximately 70% to less than 20%. Real income has grown at a rate of 7.3% over the past 10 years.¹¹

Despite tales of rampant corruption, Vietnam today is widely hailed as a development success story, transforming from one of the world’s poorest nations into one of Southeast Asia’s most prosperous economies.

Nevertheless, *doi moi* has presented the one-party Communist state with new challenges, as it seeks to protect and consolidate its authority in an era of unprecedented economic growth. First, with the transition to a market economy, there are questions about whether there should be a concomitant loosening of state control over other aspects of Vietnamese social and political life, and the extent to which Vietnam can still legitimately lay claims to being a socialist country.¹² Melanie Beresford underscores this point: “The Vietnamese state must grapple, not only with new demands arising from its own population, but aid donors and foreign investors who carry much weight by virtue of their ability to influence economic policy and investment programs.”¹³ Even with the rise in living standards and reduction of poverty, *doi moi* has resulted in deepening inequality in Vietnam.¹⁴ This has been exacerbated by state policies, which involve the dismantling of agricultural-based cooperatives in favor of household production, and the removal of many welfare subsidies, resulting in the

eradication of social safety nets such as health care, childcare, care for the infirm, and reduction in educational support.¹⁵

With the advent of *doi moi* in 1986, the Vietnamese state has also attempted to negotiate the benefits of, and incipient challenges posed by, market liberalization to national identity.¹⁶ *Van minh* (Vietnamese for “being civilized”) has since become a catchphrase in both official and popular discourses, as Vietnam has intensified its efforts to manage and make sense of the local presence of the global economy. It refers broadly to qualities associated with the developed societies of Asia and the West, including the achievement of political order, modern education, health standards, and economic discipline. At the same time, *van minh* discourse links these material criteria to elements of spiritual strengthening, to revitalized traditions that cast the state’s newest vision of modernity (party-controlled capitalism) as a triumph of primordial national culture.¹⁷ In contemporary nationalist discourse, *van minh* rests on the articulation of a seamless Confucian past alongside the imperatives of the neoliberal marketplace and its implicit cultural dangers. *Van minh* has therefore come to embody the convergence of the material and cultural ambitions of the Vietnamese postcolonial state in the forging of a national identity.

In this way, the state’s campaign for attaining *van minh* in the new global order has aspired to international standards of economic and social progress, all the while reformulating these “external” criteria as intrinsic national attributes.¹⁸ Furthermore, invoking the Confucian past attempts to anchor Vietnam’s timeless spiritual past as an ethical and moral counter to the forces of Western capitalism. This re-imagining of the historical past in postcolonial Vietnam stabilizes claims of an enduring cultural heritage in an era of rapid globalization and modernization. Scholars like Mark Bradley have even looked to the colonial past to examine continuities in Vietnamese political discourse around *van minh*:

Ironically, like the conservative opponents of radicals in the 1920s who argued that neo-Confucian principles ought to shape Vietnamese national essence, the leaders of the socialist state, once vigorous opponents of Confucian morality, now claim Vietnam’s historical identification with Confucian civilization underlies its recent market-based reforms aimed at modernization and industrialization.¹⁹

It is within this context of a generalized panic over the dissolution of local values that we must view the most recent state attempts to rehabilitate drug users. How this imaginary becomes inscribed medically on to the bodies of drug addicts reveals the transformation of a narrative of national crisis into a form of discipline, as evidenced by the “social evils” campaign.

DRUG USE AND “SOCIAL EVILS”

Under *doi moi* policy, Vietnam has undergone profound economic and social changes, witnessing the emergence of the twin epidemics of drug use and HIV. First, there has been a significant increase in the number of drug users in the country. Between 1994 and 2004, the number of drug addicts tripled in Vietnam, an average annual progression of 11.9%. The prevalence rate of drug addicts per 100,000 people increased almost threefold, from 78 to 208.²⁰ As of 2013, there were 171,000 registered drug

users in the country, nearly all men, the majority of whom injected heroin, although the actual population of drug users may have been well over 300,000.²¹ Historically, drug use has tended to cluster in several northern border provinces, important nodes in the regional and global network of narcotic trading, especially for heroin and other synthetic drugs. Although prevalence of drug abuse in some mountainous provinces is still very high compared to national levels, the demographics of drug use have gradually shifted to urban areas. One-third of the country's total number of drug addicts lived either in Ho Chi Minh City or in Hanoi. Over the past two decades, there has been a shift away from opium smoking to injecting heroin. Most recently, methamphetamine use has skyrocketed both in Vietnam and throughout the region.²²

Injection drug use (IDU) is the principal driver of the HIV epidemic in Vietnam with transmission facilitated by the sharing of dirty needles and the absence of adequate risk-reduction measures. The first case of HIV was reported in Ho Chi Minh City in 1990. By 1999, HIV infection had been reported in all 61 provinces of the country.²³ As of November 2012, the number of people living with HIV in Vietnam was 208,866.²⁴ Although the share of injecting drug users among people living with HIV in Vietnam has declined from 75% in the mid-1990s to about 50% in mid-2000s, reports from sentinel surveillance have shown steady increases in prevalence rates in this population.²⁵ While currently an estimated 26% of the IDU population is infected with HIV, in what is some encouraging news, the rate of new HIV infection among IDUs has decreased from 13.4% in 2011 to 11% in 2012. In a more worrying trend, the epidemic has recently begun to move into the general population. Female sex workers, the female partners of IDUs and their children, and urban men who have sexual intercourse with other urban men represent growing proportions of those who are infected. As Harriet Phinney argues, the HIV epidemic is not driven by drug abuse alone, but it can be linked more broadly to *doi moi* policies. The opening of the economy, accompanied by an increasingly mobile labor force, has attracted large numbers of migrant laborers, including female sex workers, to cities in ways that have transformed the urban landscape and social dynamics of city life. In particular, the commercialization and sexualization of men's leisure has had profound consequences for the dynamics of the HIV epidemic in Vietnam.²⁶

From the early days of the HIV epidemic in Vietnam, there has been a strong emphasis on linking HIV/AIDS prevention and eradication with efforts to combat drug abuse and prostitution.²⁷ No longer viewed as simply remnants of Vietnam's colonial past, drug abuse and prostitution are now cast by the state as "social evils" associated with the perceived explosion in violence and crime following economic reform and the opening of Vietnam's national borders to Western capitalism and media. In 1996, a writer of a public security news article captured the stakes, warning that if immediate measures were not taken, "social evils" in the form of "whorehouses in disguise and sex tours [would] pose extreme dangers to the health of our race, and destroy the moral foundation of our nation through the scourge of AIDS and the bad influence on the lifestyle of our youth, especially those of the feminine sex."²⁸ A representative of the Social Evils Prevention Department also warned as follows: "When we open the doors of our society, the water flows in, the clean along with the dirty. Our duty is to screen it, and to help people recognize and protect themselves from bad influences."²⁹ In response to this fear of external contamination, Vietnam's Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet initiated the "social evils" campaign,

requesting the mobilization of mass organizations, state bureaucracy, and the public at large to excise all “poisonous” forces from Vietnamese society, including premarital and extramarital sex, prostitution, homosexuality, pornography, drug and alcohol addiction, gambling, theft, abuse, and violence.

The mid-1990s was marked by an intensification of a broad government campaign against “social evils.” The first official decrees criminalizing prostitution and drug use surfaced in 1993 when the Vietnamese government issued resolutions 05/CP and 06/CP on “the prevention and control of prostitution” and on “strengthening the guidance in drug control,” respectively.³⁰ A directive issued by the Ministry of Culture and Communication in 1993 described prostitution as an assault on the moral fabric and political stability of the country and calling for its immediate prohibition: “In our country today, prostitution is growing, causing bad consequences for the cultural life of our society, for order and the governing of peace in our people, and polluting the moral traditions and beautiful customs of our nation.”³¹ Meanwhile, the resolution condemning drug use as “opposed to the moral tradition of the nation” was followed by a complex set of laws in 1994 and 1995 formalizing the principle of forced treatment for drug dependency.³² The resulting drug policy in Vietnam included draconian drug laws, periodic crackdowns, and mandatory detention and forced detoxification in rehabilitation centers known as “06 centers” (“05 centers” targeting sex workers were also instituted). These punitive policies were accompanied by public propaganda campaigns against drug use in which drug addicts were portrayed as weak-willed and morally corrupted individuals, as blights on the honor of their families and the country as a whole.³³

INTERNATIONAL NGOs AND THE “SHIFT TO HARM REDUCTION” IN VIETNAM

In the late-1990s and early-2000s, as the number of drug users continued to grow and the country faced the prospect of a more generalized epidemic, international donor agencies and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) turned their attention to Vietnam. In 2004, it was named a PEPFAR focus country, the only one of the 15 countries thus designated to have an HIV epidemic concentrated among injecting drug users – and the target of extensive funding and advocacy around HIV prevention and treatment. The effort to shape drug policy in Southeast Asia was not new; rather, it was part of a more long-term, global strategy for the exportation of harm reduction in the region. From the early-2000s, international organizations such as the Ford Foundation, Family Health International, USAID’s Health Policy Initiative, and UNAIDS worked to facilitate the adoption and implementation of policy instruments and technical guidelines based on international best practices and coordinated the involvement of international and national experts through training workshops and overseas study trips of key officials to Australia, the United States, and China. In 2009–2010, \$266.6 million U.S. dollars were used to fund HIV treatment in Vietnam, of which almost three-fourths came from international donors.³⁴

For international observers concerned about the high levels of stigma and discrimination in Vietnamese society, which served as major disincentives for drug users to seek out HIV prevention and treatment services, the introduction of harm reduction policies was seen as a powerful way of decoupling the discourse of “social evils” from HIV

and drug use. Harm reduction is typically defined as a set of ideas and core practices aimed at reducing negative consequences of drug use. It is based on the recognition that many people may be unwilling or unable to stop using drugs so the goal is to make drug use safer and to provide support to drug users, their families, and the community. Practices associated with harm reduction – including needle exchange, voluntary HIV counseling and testing, and methadone – have been proven to be safe, feasible, effective, and cost-effective. Furthermore, harm reduction is based on principles of dignity and compassion, and grounded in the respect and promotion of the human rights of drug users.³⁵ Harm reduction, in this way, is conceived as a kind of bridge between “human rights, public health, drug policy and HIV policies” that needs to be mainstreamed as part of public health response. This rhetoric of human rights reflects the convergence of global public health and human rights discourses in recent decades.³⁶

Yet, this international consensus around the goals and practices of harm reduction has collided with local understandings of harm reduction in Vietnam, a set of beliefs and practices that follows a different kind of logic about the nature of drug-related harm. In a country where drug use is considered both an individual failing and a threat to society, harm reduction is imagined as reducing harm to society as opposed to individuals. By insisting that a harm reduction agenda derived from these alternative principles is equally if not more legitimate, Vietnamese policymakers resisted reforms proposed by external actors with a powerful negotiating tactic to argue that they have, in fact, always been committed to harm reduction.³⁷

Even as donor agencies work to shape and direct the local response around what harm reduction is, or should be, based on international standards, they have also tried to facilitate local leadership and control over the policy shift. A perceived sensitivity among the Vietnamese to pressures from international development, itself a legacy of colonial occupation in the region, was thought to hamper earlier, more aggressive, harm reduction efforts.³⁸ Thus, a 2006 report from the POLICY project on their work with Vietnam’s HIV-positive community stated: “Where there is little or no support for autonomous development and involvement, as was the case in Vietnam until recently, the potential for international actors to shape and direct *what should be an indigenous movement* is strong.”³⁹ This includes an explicit avoidance of the language of human rights, seen as unnecessarily provocative and even counterproductive, in the Vietnamese context. Instead, international actors working in Vietnam have emphasized the utility of harm reduction programs to keep people alive and have tended to frame their involvement in terms of offers of technical support.⁴⁰

International donors and NGOs participated in high-level meetings with senior Communist Party leaders, but since then they have focused their energies on the local level where there is thought to be greater flexibility and openness to change. Pilot projects on peer education, for instance, and the introduction of provincial level, limited scale, methadone treatment to prevent HIV transmission among IDUs were common strategies adopted by international organizations to grow grassroots support for harm reduction measures. In addition, a cross-border HIV prevention project launched in 2001 in southern China and northern Vietnam demonstrated the effectiveness of working with local police and other government agencies in facilitating harm reduction activities, such as needle and syringe exchange, as well as easing community stigmatization and encouraging the participation of injection drug users. For example, some provincial officials concluded that instead of focusing exclusively

on drug users as outreach workers, it would instead be possible to expand the network of intervention. While in some settings the commune police represented major stumbling blocks to harm reduction, in others it has been possible to develop positive relationships with local authorities who have “a sense of being in control and weren’t threatened by this activity through outreach to drug users.”⁴¹

Responding to international pressure and funding, Vietnam in 2004 listed harm reduction for the first time as one of the official goals of the national HIV strategy. It also provided support for syringe exchange and condom distribution programs for high-risk groups, including IDUs and female sex workers, as well as HIV testing and treatment in the community.⁴² The 2006 Law on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control, passed with the backing of the international donor community (including the World Health Organization, USAID, the World Bank, and the United Kingdom Department for International Development), endorsed the treatment of drug addiction by using methadone as a drug substitute. And in 2009, drug use behavior was removed from the penal code and drug users were recognized as “patients” rather than criminals for the first time.⁴³ By the end of 2012, 20 provinces were running methadone maintenance clinics servicing over 12,000 patients with plans to scale-up to 245 clinics with the capacity to service 80,000 users by 2015. Community-based needle and syringe exchange programs also greatly expanded with 88% of provinces and cities in Vietnam implementing free clean needle programs by 2012, with an estimated 26.5 million syringes distributed nationwide.⁴⁴ It is remarkable that harm reduction programs in Vietnam often go beyond what is possible in donor nations from which they have come. Perhaps most strikingly at the very moment NGOs (including some from the United States) were pressing the case for sterile syringes in Vietnam, the U.S. government was firmly anti-needle exchange in both its domestic and foreign policy.

DRUG DETENTION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In the public health community, Vietnam is viewed as a success story and the introduction of harm reduction in the country described as an important, even dramatic, break with prior policy.⁴⁵ Yet, alongside the expansion of the public health-based approach to drug policy in Vietnam is a growing “parallel system” of drug detention centers. By 2010, six years after the passage of the Vietnamese law that formally embraced harm reduction, the numbers of detainees had grown considerably; of the 135,000 people estimated to use drugs in the country, Vietnam detained 60,000 countrywide. There remains some contention, however, over the accuracy of these estimates and whether they represent the numbers of those detained in a year or those detained at any one time.⁴⁶ Ho Chi Minh City, home to some of the first harm reduction programs in the country, also holds the country’s largest compulsory drug treatment program. In 2007, there were about 50,000 residents in 06 centers nationwide (or about 25% of drug users in the country), with about 30,000 of these in Ho Chi Minh City. Between 2006 and 2010, Vietnam detained 169,000 drug users with 40,000 people detained in 2010 alone. The Vietnamese government even began to export the model to Cambodia. This country has become the target of forceful critiques from human rights organizations.⁴⁷

These 06 centers, run at the national level by the Ministry of Labor as opposed to the Ministry of Health, operate with a high degree of variation at the local level of

administration. As the Human Rights Watch report from 2011 notes, some centers take the form of “prison-like compounds in cities, others are sprawling clusters of barracks located in peri-urban industrial zones; others resemble expansive agricultural estates in remote border provinces. Some centers hold just a few dozen detainees while others may hold several hundred.”⁴⁸ Many also double as detention centers for sex workers. While no two drug detention centers are exactly alike, they all tend to “emphasize detoxification over 7–10 days and the ‘moral re-education’ of drug users, which focuses on developing moral strength in resisting the evils of drugs” including the use of “therapeutic labor” which remains especially prevalent in the south.⁴⁹ Therapeutic labor, including basic occupational training, is mandatory and often brutal, leading one informant, based on his own observations inside one of the facilities, to starkly describe centers as “forced labor camps.”⁵⁰ In official government terminology, the centers are referred to as “Centers for Social Education and Labor” (Trung tâm giáo dục và lao động xã hội) or as “Centers for Vocational Training and Job Placement” (Trung tâm dạy nghề và giải quyết việc làm).

Detainees are forced to work in forms of agricultural production (either for outside sale, such as cashew processing and potato or coffee farming, or for consumption by detainees), garment manufacturing, and construction work. Detainees are most commonly paid at levels well below the minimum wage, or their wages are held as credit, against which centers levy charges for items such as food, accommodation, and “managerial fees.” Due to the large scale of production, these centers represent strong seeds of financial and political capital that act as powerful barriers to change. Most centers have labor contracts with outside businesses.

Those detained are rarely provided with drug dependence treatment and medical supervisions of interventions are minimal; significant drug-related HIV risk within these facilities has also been reported. According to the Vietnamese government, relapse rates are said to have decreased since 2000 to 75%. However, most independent estimates hover around 90% (WHO WPRO 2009). High relapse rates also mean multiple terms in the centers for repeat offenders who are often sent back to these institutions. While in 2003 objections were voiced in Vietnam’s National Assembly for plans to officially increase the length of drug detention sentences, the Assembly approved the extension in the form of a pilot project for five years, which eventually became encoded into law in 2009. Drug detention terms, which typically vary between six months and two years, were extended to include two years of “rehabilitation” in addition to two years of “post-rehabilitation management” for some detainees, which in practice means more of the same. Because there is no formal judicial process for entry or exit (drug users are detained without trial or clinical assessment of drug use or drug dependence), the 06 center is essentially a form of “administrative punishment.”

Compulsory drug treatment represents a clear violation of a number of human rights including – freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention, the right to freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, fair trial, privacy, the highest attainable standard of health, and freedom from forced labor.⁵¹ For international NGOs and donor agencies working over the last decade to shift policy perspectives in Vietnam to a “harm reduction” approach that is focused on individual rights, these centers pose serious dilemmas. Debates within the international community generally revolve around the extent to which working within

closed settings also works to legitimize them and the appropriate limits of accommodation with the Vietnamese government. For example, does one work from within to promote change or does one refuse to collaborate with the functioning of these institutions? How best to condemn the centers while preserving working relations with the government in moving the international harm reduction agenda forward? While those who consider ๐6 centers “concentration camps” predicated on a “social engineering strategy” say that it is impossible to work within centers without also legitimizing them, others argue that they are “too strongly entrenched to be abolished” and so international agencies need to work for marginal change from within. At a minimum there is a need, some assert, to provide lifesaving or urgent medical care that does “not build capacity.”

The HRW report voiced criticism of those international organizations that engage in capacity building and service provision within the centers, charging them of working both implicitly and explicitly (through the subsidization of operating costs) to prevent the closure of the centers, while also failing to monitor human rights abuses within their walls. In March 2012, the UN issued a joint statement citing compulsory drug detention and rehabilitation centers as incompatible with the protection of human rights and the health of drug users and calling for their immediate closure worldwide (UNAIDS 2012). In June 2012, the Vietnamese National Assembly voted to end the detention of thousands of sex workers in so-called rehabilitation facilities. The closure of these centers represents a significant achievement for those committed to improving due process in Vietnam and an important step towards ending the arbitrary and prolonged nature of punishment. For drug policy reformers these changes signal that the Vietnamese government may now finally be willing to consider a similar overhaul of the country’s drug detention system (Wolfe 2012). The future direction of policy will also be shaped by the significant reduction of international funding and support for the HIV response as Vietnam has graduated to “middle income” status.⁵²

CONCLUSION

Vietnam has come under intense fire in recent years from international human rights organizations, from condemnations over the criminalization of drug use to the jailing of prominent political activists.⁵³ Though marginalized in society, drug users have played a central role in the affirmation of Vietnamese national identity during the period following the *doi moi* economic reforms. Drug use is considered a “social evil” and associated with Western contamination, and drug users are subject to forms of moral condemnation and social marginalization. With the opening of Vietnam to foreign aid, efforts to shift policy perspectives to embrace an evidence-based, human rights approach to public health have met with challenges as Vietnam attempts to maintain national control amidst unprecedented levels of foreign investment. This can be seen in the embrace of an alternative grammar of harm reduction, which does not view needle exchange and drug detention as contradictory practices but rather as part of a continuum of policy designed to reduce the harms of drug use to society.

In this way, I am making a different kind of argument than one grounded in the “Asian values” debate that frames the critique of the universality of human rights

as a Western invention. Rather than suggest the notion of Asian cultural values is invoked instrumentally to protect authoritarian regimes from external interference, or that Asian cultural values are not in fact incompatible with Western notions of human rights, I depart from human rights scholars by focusing on the historical figure of the drug user and its role in the construction of national narratives.⁵⁴ Specifically I have looked at the discourse and practices of rehabilitation of drug users in post-*doi moi* Vietnam as part of broader state efforts to manage the social fallout of the embrace of neoliberal economic policies. I have also outlined the dilemmas facing the global public health and human rights communities over how best to influence policy agendas in postcolonial Southeast Asia. This historical perspective helps to make sense of the co-existence of the criminalization of drug use with the expansion of harm reduction activities in the country, and provide policymakers with a *longue durée* account of state interest in drug use and its role in configuring the relationship between Vietnam and the West.

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PART VI

POSTCOLONIAL CULTURES
AND DIGITAL HUMANITIES



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CHAPTER NINETEEN

BREAKING AND BUILDING

The case of postcolonial digital humanities



Roopika Risam

The 2014 Modern Language Association Convention saw the first panel on postcolonial digital humanities,¹ an emerging line of inquiry that seeks a dialogue between the global analyses of knowledge production and power within postcolonial studies and the praxis-driven field of the digital humanities. Topics included decolonizing digital humanities, digital archival silences, postcolonial game studies, the postcolonial digital human, and building global scholarly networks, demonstrating the range of conversations proliferating at the confluences of postcolonial studies and digital humanities. Though a new term framed through emerging conversations about digital humanities, “postcolonial digital humanities” encompasses a broader history of contact between postcolonial criticism and the digital milieu. Since the early 1990s, postcolonial scholars have embraced the affordances of digital media to produce knowledge about the field.² In the last decade, science and technology studies has engaged with postcolonial thought through “postcolonial computing,” a critique of development discourse in technology design.³ More recently “decolonial computing” has brought critical race theory into conversation with theories of postcolonial computing.⁴ New media scholars have turned to postcolonial thought as well, considering digital subalternity and networks of capital, communication, and power that mediate between global communities.⁵ Within the digital humanities, postcolonial scholars have produced digital scholarship in the form of cultural heritage, archival, and mapping projects.⁶

Indebted to this intellectual genealogy, postcolonial digital humanities brings together the ethos of making, building, and creating of the digital humanities with critiques of imperialism in regimes of knowledge and power that emerge from postcolonial studies. The “postcolonial” in postcolonial digital humanities gestures towards the significance of postcolonial theory for theorizing the seeming absence of ethnic, national, or ideological considerations in digital humanities.⁷ Theories of hybridity, subalternity, and globalization are central to postcolonial digital humanities, as is the connection between imperialism, power, and knowledge production identified by postcolonial critics. “Digital humanities” denotes the emerging interdisciplinary field of study that engages with computational technology and digital media in the service of humanistic inquiry.⁸ These definitions are not intended to suggest that digital

humanities is untheoretical or that postcolonial studies is not concerned with praxis. Rather, the two bodies of work in their synthesis and engagement yield surprising and keen insights on technology, power, and knowledge production through anti-imperialist lenses and on a global scale. In this vein, postcolonial digital humanities operates dialectically, bringing postcolonial studies and digital humanities together to reveal the possibilities at the juncture of the material and the theoretical.

Mediating at the intersections of praxis and theory, of building and breaking, postcolonial studies brings to digital humanities the question of representation within knowledge production. As such, postcolonial digital humanities offers a language to ask of digital humanities important questions such as who is speaking, who is being spoken of, who is spoken for, which languages are being used, and what assumptions subtend its production, distribution, and consumption. At the same time, digital humanities offers postcolonial studies a model for negotiating the relationship between praxis and theory.

Among the tensions that emerge when putting postcolonial studies and digital humanities in conversation are the competing roles of theory and praxis within the two. Intersections of postcolonial studies and digital humanities suggest that the two approach the relationship between theory and praxis from different vantage points: from theory to praxis in postcolonial studies and from praxis to theory in the digital humanities. Critics of postcolonial studies, for example, have suggested that the field's basis in European critical theory yields critiques of Eurocentrism that are themselves Eurocentric. Moreover, they contend that the often jargon-heavy language of postcolonial theory remains inaccessible to the people whose conditions postcolonial critique purports to theorize. In such critiques, the field appears less concerned with political praxis than the reproduction of the conditions of production for postcolonial criticism itself.⁹ On the other hand, one of the primary debates in the digital humanities has been over whether one has to “build” to be a digital humanist.¹⁰ Emphasis on building has led critics to charge that the field is under-theorized, privileging the creation of tools over analysis. Yet, by looking more closely at the role of building in digital humanities, we find productive overlap with concerns about representational practices and inclusion from postcolonial studies. While the relationship between Eurocentrism and building, at face value, seem incommensurate, they exemplify the ways that theory and praxis have been taken up in postcolonial studies and digital humanities, respectively.

To examine the relationship between theory and praxis, I take up the relation between “building” and “breaking” in the digital humanities to explore continuities between postcolonial critique and digital humanities scholarship. For digital humanists, knowledge and theory have been thought to emerge through praxis, uncovered in the building of databases, the act of coding, or the creation of a map. For postcolonialists, “building” conjures acts of empire-building or nation-building, processes that shape the creation and dissemination of knowledge and incur suspicion of it. If the act of “world-making” is both empirical and ideological, what of the virtual worlds produced through digital humanities? More recently, renewed conversation has appeared around the role of “breaking” in the digital humanities. The act of dismantling produces new ways of knowing and understanding and theories that emerge from undoing. Such figurations of breaking as a form of unmaking to make anew echo processes of decolonization – not simply the collapse of empire

and decolonization of the nation-state but also the decolonizing of the mind that so often remains incomplete.¹¹ The impetus for postcolonial studies lies in the sense that postcolonial theory can recognize the latent forms of imperialism that persist within histories and cultures. Such recognition is a precursor to understanding the possibilities of political praxis, which may arise from theory. Put in conversation with each other, postcolonial studies and digital humanities share a conceptual vocabulary for how knowledge is produced, despite radically different approaches.

EPISTEMOLOGIES OF DIGITAL BUILDING

One issue central to postcolonial digital humanities is how conversations around building shape the politics of inclusion and exclusion in the field. At the 2011 Modern Language Association Convention Stephen Ramsay gave a talk called “Who’s In and Who’s Out,” setting off a furor over the question of belonging. The talk canonized the thorny issue of who “counts” as a digital humanist and, by extension, what the digital humanities is. In his now-famous statement, Ramsay said, “Personally, I think Digital Humanities is about building things.”¹² He goes on to clarify that he interprets “building” broadly in a way that “includes and should include people who theorize about building, people who design so that others might build, and those who supervise building.”¹³ This watershed articulation of inclusion and exclusion identifies a relationship between the act of building and the definition of the digital humanities: one must build to be a digital humanist. There seems to be some measure of latitude in what constitutes the act of making – though this is subject to debate as well. However, the title of Ramsay’s talk alone suggests the very questions of authority, inclusion, and influence raised in postcolonial scholarship. The question of “Who’s in and who’s out?” and its relationship to building is often raised in conjunction with concerns over lack of inclusive representation within digital humanities. Even when difference is acknowledged, it tends to produce a monolithic other of the digital humanities, distancing difference from the mainstream digital humanities community. Postcolonial digital humanities, framed as a “global exploration of race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability within cultures of technology,”¹⁴ however, embraces the investment of postcolonial feminism in specificity within the broader category of difference and an awareness of the structural limitations that shape experiences of difference within digital humanities.

Ramsay’s remarks reflect anxieties over the relationship between theory and praxis in the digital humanities. The move of defining digital humanities through building privileges praxis over theory, drawing a line in the sand that denotes what does or does not count as digital humanities. A definition like “digital humanities applies humanistic methods to digital objects cultures” – which seems implied by the term itself – would not be sufficient because it fails to acknowledge the role of building in the field’s practices and methodologies. Emphasizing the significance of building, the book *Digital Humanities* (2012) argues: “The mere use of digital tools for the purpose of humanistic research and communication does not qualify as Digital Humanities.”¹⁵ That is to say, simply using an existing tool does not a digital humanist make. For example, using Voyant Tools, a web-based textual analysis environment that generates word clouds, summaries, vocabulary density, and a corpus reader, would not necessarily be “digital humanities” by virtue of use alone. These narrow definitions

distinguish between the digital humanities and fields like new media studies or critical code studies, which privilege analysis over creation of media, creating specious divisions between them. Moreover, they reinforce a false binary between “hack” (coding, building, doing) and “yack” (talking, critiquing, theorizing), concepts that have come to characterize the digital humanities but have become so distorted that they lack much currency for critique.¹⁶ The focus on building has led to charges that digital humanities is insufficiently theorized. In response, Geoffrey Rockwell has suggested, “[Digital humanities] is under-theorized in the way any craft field that developed to share knowledge that can’t adequately be captured in discourse is.”¹⁷ Put another way, digital humanities is an epistemology of building.¹⁸ All “yack” emerges from “hack.”

As such, theories of digital humanities arise from praxis. From the act of creation emerges the *je ne sais quoi* of the digital humanities: knowledge produced when an act of scholarship transcends the realm of textual inquiry through a methodology of making. This is an idea that Rockwell describes as the “craft knowledge” of the digital humanities, likening the field to a trade comprised of manual labor where building is done by hand.¹⁹ Matt Bouchard calls digital humanities a form of trade knowledge, “filled with awe, beauty, and knowing that few are talking about.”²⁰ Kathi Inman Berens suggests a connection between manual elements of building and ways of knowing: “learning how to build requires your sense of how things work. . . . There’s some kind of recursive loop between the fingers and the brain. . . . [N]ow my fingers know it to be true.”²¹ Ryan Heuser echoes Berens’s invocation of a tactile experience. He links an epistemology of building to Bourdieu’s work on the aesthetic disposition, a tendency towards detachment that he suggests is “arguably the form of knowing at the center of the ‘traditional’ Humanities.”²² Building, he explains, “is the opposite of detachment. Building is a form of creation. Creation is the ultimate participation.”²³ Heuser provides a careful description of the knowledge-building intersections in digital humanities:

We in DH know we are building models. . . . And we love and learn from it. We seek to mold ourselves into the shape of our objects. . . . Knowledge for us is an active process. A relentless dialectic of self and other.²⁴

Tom Scheinfeldt links the concept of “building as knowing” to the history of science, in which knowledge is produced through engagement with tools. Sometimes, he notes, tools are developed to answer questions, while at other times, answers are a by-product of tool production.²⁵ These examples suggest that knowledge in digital humanities is not only discursive. That is to say, knowledge produced through the material act of building is not readily translatable to discourse – and certainly not to the language of poststructuralism that “theory” connotes. Those who champion the role of building in the digital humanities do not want to see the craft knowledge of digital humanities supplanted by theoretical scholarship. These tensions have parallels with key debates in postcolonial studies, particularly over the relationship between materiality and theory. Those who favor material specificity find the relationship of postcolonial theory to poststructuralism controversial, arguing that it is prone to charges of jargon-heavy appropriation of the political struggles of dispossessed subaltern groups.²⁶ The critique of discourse within postcolonial studies in favor of greater engagement with materiality echoes how digital humanities favors ways of knowing beyond discourse.

From digital tools to empires, building is a primary site of inquiry within post-colonial digital humanities. From a postcolonial perspective, we might consider how building within digital humanities constitutes an act of world-making. Digital humanities scholarship has not always recognized the influence of imperial or colonial ways of knowing on the development of the field. This is a particularly important concern, given the role of technology in the construction of channels of power, knowledge, and capital in which the digital humanities is implicated.²⁷ The field is not unique, in the sense that its power dynamics derive from its articulation within the North American and Western European academy. Yet it leaves its relationship to global forms of power unexamined while espousing a philosophy of openness, inclusion, and niceness that is admirable but does not negate its implication in these regimes of knowledge.²⁸

Viewing building as a type of world-making with the potential to replicate dimensions of colonialism yields further insight on the debate over “hack” and “yack.” These absences are revealed in the ways that digital humanities treats coding as a form of world-making. The metaphor of world-making is apt for the practices of coding but troubling as well. Matthew Kirschenbaum describes programming as “a unique and startling way of looking at the world . . . in fact, a kind of world-making.”²⁹ The coder becomes the world-maker, charged “to specify the behaviors of an object or a system from the ground up.”³⁰ Kirschenbaum identifies a link between the work of the programmer and that of a writer like Jane Austen, whom he calls “one of our ultimate system builders and world-makers.”³¹ When we code, we make worlds, determining the rules that prescribe the system and the defining characteristics of the environment, an act that echoes the colonial enterprise. Accordingly, Kirschenbaum notes, “Programming is about choices and constraints, and about how you choose to model some select slice of the world around you in the formal environment of a computer.”³² His students create worlds when they model realistic snowballs, a task that requires designing the world in which the snowball exists, attending to rules and observable characteristics. Such a task requires defining details like how snowballs are made, the circumstances under which they melt, the way snowballs travel through space. In short, Kirschenbaum argues, to model a plausible snowball requires the creation of the world in which the snowball inhabits. By “world,” Kirschenbaum means “something very much like model, a selective and premeditated representation of reality, where some elements of the real are emphasized and exaggerated, others are distorted and caricatured, still others are absent altogether.”³³ Kirschenbaum links the world-making of programming to the world-making of literature through grammar – from the simple building blocks of syntax, subjects, actions, and objects arise whole plots, indeed whole worlds. Through such a connection, he exemplifies the intimate link between digital and humanistic inquiry that emerges through building. Kirschenbaum acknowledges the fault in these acts of world-making; virtual worlds are empirical but they are not objective and “embody their authors’ biases, blind spots, ideologies, prejudices, and opinions.”³⁴ That is to say virtual world-making, like colonial world-making, is an ideological act that is not neutral but is embedded in historical, social, political, and economic specificities. He also notes that the “world” being made is neither singular nor static because “reality can be sliced and sampled in an infinite variety of ways.”³⁵ Further, Kirschenbaum identifies the forms of knowledge that emerge from building virtual worlds, an epistemology comprised of “interactive, manipulable, extensible . . . sites of exploration, simulation,

play.”³⁶ As models of the physical world, virtual worlds can provide a new way of accessing and understanding the world around us. Yet, we can only do so if we understand the ideological nature of the enterprise and the possibility of replicating colonial dimensions of power. Our experience of technology as an inscrutable black box, along with the role of building in digital humanities, leads to emphasis on “hack.” This itself is not a problem, so long as we attend to the ways digital technologies can reproduce colonial regimes of knowledge. Therefore, the work of postcolonial digital humanities requires openness to the role of building as an avenue for understanding the colonial dimensions of world-making and for developing strategies to counter their effects on digital humanities as practiced.

As Kirshenbaum has suggested, programming is one exercise in the creation of new worlds in virtual spaces. Geographic information systems (GIS) allow us to create not only maps but new ways of mapping the world through spatial data. Digital archives offer seemingly limitless ways of preserving, arranging, and disseminating knowledge. Yet the contexts in which much of the building within digital humanities is done often fail to account for the ways it reproduces existing inequalities, many of which are the legacies of colonialism. Code, standards, and design aesthetics are contextual and constructed, not universal. Despite the access they afford, digital archives are prone to the same exclusions as print ones. A new map does not necessarily reshape the dynamics of power that structure space and place. As a result, digital humanities risks conjuring the world-making of the colonial project in digital form. This includes physical dimensions of colonialism – settler colonies, maps, colonial archives – as well as the intangible aspects – new legal systems, literature, colonizing of the mind. A cornerstone of modernity, colonialism has built our contemporary world. Additionally, it has created the ways we *know* the world.

The question, then, is how the relationship between praxis and theory can be productively negotiated to ensure digital humanities does not simply reproduce hegemonic patterns in knowledge production. An epistemology of building in the digital humanities serves as a bridge between the material and the discursive. In the knowledge produced, we can look for exclusions and dynamics of power that emerge around representation. Such an approach has roots in theories of materiality, including Kirshenbaum’s description of “forensic” (physical traces of an object) and “formal” (compositional) forms of materiality³⁷ and Johanna Drucker’s argument for “performative materiality,” which engages with critical theory to construct a framework of analysis for understanding materiality beyond forensic and formal attributes, towards embodied user experience. In doing so, she makes the case for renewed attention to the role of theory in digital humanities.³⁸

More recently, digital humanities projects have begun productively negotiating the relationship between theory and praxis to redress the power dynamics that center the putative “West” in digital humanities. Alex Gil’s *Around Digital Humanities in 80 Days* (*AroundDH*) is a prime example that identifies gaps in representation that emerge from other projects and builds new models for addressing them.³⁹ For 80 days, Gil and a team of editors produced entries featuring digital humanities projects from around the world on a website that sought to rewrite the map of the global digital humanities. The new map challenges the existing model of global digital humanities, an infographic by Melissa Terras that quantifies the numbers and locations of digital humanities centers around the world. Terras’s map depicts a digital humanities dominated by the U.S.,

U.K., and Canada.⁴⁰ In its conception, design, and execution, *AroundDH* provides a useful case study of interventions possible in the digital humanities around issues of inclusion and interface. By virtue of its engagement with alternate forms of representation, *AroundDH* builds a project and a map, remaking the world of digital humanities. Each of the 80 days offered new points on a map of digital humanities, and after 80 days, the world of digital humanities was revealed to be global indeed.

In its conception, which began with Gil's habit of sending regular emails to colleagues highlighting digital humanities projects from around the world, *AroundDH* resembles the "empire writes back" strategy of postcolonial writers who sought to correct misrepresentations of their histories and cultures that reinforced colonial attitudes by revising or rewriting dominant narratives.⁴¹ Theoretically informed by this move in postcolonial studies, the project typifies the idea of building as "methodology-as-epistemological-wedge," using building as a methodology to fundamentally alter the regime of knowledge. In the case of *AroundDH*, the map of digital humanities itself is called into question; indeed, Gil's map is becoming a new visual for how global digital humanities is understood, in place of Terras's. Such an approach that mediates between the hack/yack binary exemplifies Bruno Latour's identification of a discursive shift from critiquing to composing, which he describes as using a hammer to "repair, take care, assemble, reassemble, stitch together" rather than "break down walls, destroy idols, ridiculous prejudices."⁴² Rather than simply stating a critique, Gil's project surveys the global landscape of digital humanities and carefully builds a model to generate new forms of knowledge from which theories of digital humanities may emerge. Berens and Brian Croxall suggest that there is a link between Ramsay's radical hermeneutic of building and criticism, describing both of them as a "lapidary process: slicing the facets of the same gem."⁴³ *AroundDH* exemplifies this intimate relationship between building and theorizing in the digital humanities, drawing attention to the ways that a digital humanities centered on the U.S., U.K., and Canada fails to account for the work that goes on around the world. Moreover, *AroundDH* reveals the challenges to a global digital humanities, from partnerships between U.S. universities and those in other countries, some of which send uni-directional – verging on neo-colonial – support for digital humanities around the world, to the local practices that support or contravene development of digital humanities, such as communities that are skeptical of digital cultural heritage or archival projects. Yet, this is knowledge that has only emerged from Gil's efforts to intervene in representation in the digital humanities.

Moreover, Gil designed the project with access in mind to ensure that the *AroundDH* website would load quickly regardless of internet infrastructure. In doing so, he has demonstrated better practices for more accessible projects, an important contribution to the theoretical apparatus of digital humanities. As a result, *AroundDH* demonstrates that design is one area where praxis and theory meet. This is an idea that Jean Bauer has championed, in response to arguments that theory is somehow separate from project development:

Every digital humanities project I have ever worked on or heard about is steeped in theoretical implications AND THEIR CREATORS KNOW IT. And we know it whether we are classed as faculty or staff by our organizations. Libraries and other groups involved in digital humanities are full of people with advanced degrees in the humanities who aren't faculty, as well as plenty of people without

those advanced degrees who know the theory anyway. . . . When we create these systems we bring our theoretical understandings to bear on our digital projects including (but not limited to) decisions about: controlled vocabulary (or the lack thereof), search algorithms, interface design, color palettes, and data structure.⁴⁴

The development of *AroundDH* exemplifies Bauer's argument of theory by design. The project was created using minimal computing, "an intellectual concept, akin to environmentalism, asking for balance between gains and costs in related areas that include social justice issues and de-manufacturing and reuse, not to mention re-thinking high-income assumptions about 'e-waste' and what people do with it."⁴⁵ In practical terms, minimal computing eschews high-bandwidth or high-performance desktop computing in favor of more accessible practices. With minimal computing in mind, Gil chose the Jekyll open-source platform for its low-bandwidth, creating a simple, static website. Intended to load quickly around the world, across varied internet infrastructures, *AroundDH* is text-based and does not rely on a database. That is to say, the project demonstrates how an awareness of postcolonial critiques of globalization and technology, particularly around issues of access, wealth, and uneven development, can be enacted in the design phases of digital humanities project development.

FROM BUILDING TO BREAKING

The flip side of building, "breaking," has gained currency within digital humanities as well. The move towards breaking is loosely derived from Jerome McGann and Lisa Samuels's work on "deformance," which Mark Sample describes as "an interpretive concept premised upon deliberately misreading a text, for example, reading a poem backwards line-by-line."⁴⁶ There are both implicit and explicit approaches to the digital humanities that constitute breaking. The implicit forms take the shape of critique, which reveals exclusions and representational gaps in digital humanities, such as recent critiques of labor within the field. Natalia Cecire, for example, considers how the ways of doing prescribed by the digital humanities is spoken in terms of manual labor of the "white, male, blue-collar variety. . . . 'hands-on,' 'getting your hands dirty,' 'dirt' (as in the Digital Research Tools wiki), 'digging' (as in the Digging into Data Challenge), 'mining,' and of course 'building.'"⁴⁷ Signaling the relationship between labor and identity, Cecire calls attention to the intersections of race, gender, and class within digital humanities. Addressing class from a different perspective, Alan Liu raises concern about exclusions on the premise that building something, like a structure, requires not only the *builder* but also a range of professionals whose labor raises the building. As such, Liu agrees with the link between building and knowing, "so long as we recognize the multiplicity of builder roles (including the importance of interpreters, critics, and theorists in the enterprise, many of them the same people as the coders, etc.)."⁴⁸ In doing so, he proffers a critique of implicit hierarchies of power that privilege particular forms of labor when there are a range of roles that are needed to develop a project. Mark Marino also notes the troubled nature of labor implied within the building debates:

The aspect of learning by copying and then modifying, which is true of so many literacies, has such a crucial role in programming culture – or even

learning by finding some code and reverse engineering it in your head or with the documentation – that this notion of “building” or (and this is getting close) “building something on your own” – reveals itself to be a notion whose time is finally up.⁴⁹

He suggests that cutting, pasting, and modifying code is so ingrained in the practice of building that the nature of building is called into question. Additionally, coding is a highly skilled form of labor, knowledge of which is available to very few. As Miriam Posner has noted, coding is a practice that is not neutral; men – white, middle class men in particular – are more likely to have been encouraged to code at an early age.⁵⁰ As a result, barriers exist along lines of class, race, and gender. Moreover, *how* to build is subjective, a point that David Golumbia has made: “If you think back ten years, many applications that required real coding, and then later required knowledge of some building skills, can today be done by people who know nothing that could be called ‘coding.’”⁵¹ He suggests that within the digital humanities, the investment in building is being used in the service of a powerful group of digital humanities elite who *can* code to silence those who cannot. As Golumbia suggests, the coding debate, which is divisive in nature, has been used to downplay the contributions of scholars whose work is deeply invested in digital dimensions of their disciplines on the basis of a lack of engagement with building. Subtending these critiques is the unspoken question of whose labor is valued, a question that recalls critiques of globalization and development within postcolonial studies. Even beyond the labor sources for digital humanities projects – project directors, coders, graduate students – we must consider the global dimensions of labor. These would include the people, often in developing nations, who are producing technologies, often for low wages.

Such dynamics remind us of the fraught power relations that structure technology and knowledge production on a global scale, an issue often left unexamined within digital humanities. For example, sharing has been represented as an affordance of the digital milieu. Sample suggests:

We are no longer bound by the physical demands of printed books and paper journals, no longer constrained by production costs and distribution friction, no longer hampered by a top-down and unsustainable business model. And we should no longer be content to make our work public achingly slowly along ingrained routes, authors and readers alike delayed by innumerable gateways limiting knowledge production and sharing.⁵²

Because of the freedom offered by digital media, the digital humanities transfers agency onto the participants to share:

We have the opportunity to distribute that future more evenly. We have the opportunity to distribute knowledge more fairly, and in greater forms. The “builders” will build and the “thinkers” will think, but all of us, no matter where we fall on this false divide, we all need to share. Because we can.⁵³

Sample proposes that *sharing*, rather than *building*, is at the heart of the digital humanities because “the digital reshapes the representation, sharing, and discussion

of knowledge.”⁵⁴ In doing so, he shifts the discourse over building in a more optimistic direction. Yet, we would do well to consider that this may be the case for digital humanists in the U.S., Canada, or Western Europe but such access is not necessarily a global phenomenon. In their critiques of building, such arguments effect an undoing – an attempt to dismantle or to break apart the power dynamics reproduced within the digital humanities.

Aside from implicit forms of breaking are explicit ones that emerge from the digital humanities. We might conceptualize hacking, one of the vaunted forms of building in the digital humanities, as a form of breaking. Paul Fyfe has argued that digital humanities has “made hacking a discipline,” defining “hacking” as to “adapt, manipulate, and make productive use out of a given technology or technological context or platform.”⁵⁵ Cecire proposes that we might understand hacking as “an embodied, experiential, extra discursive epistemology,” or what the history of science dubs “tacit knowledge.”⁵⁶ Through hacking, tacit knowledge emerges as an element of breaking – of code, of firewalls, of passwords, of existing structures. As Tad Suiter suggests, “A hacker is a person who looks at systemic knowledge structures and learns about them from making or doing.”⁵⁷ To build is to hack, to hack is to break, to build is to break.

Yet, breaking has an explicit dimension as well, as an act of deformance or new understanding produced by the taking apart or unmaking of an object. Such a move evokes the power of decolonization to create new knowledge by dismantling existing regimes of knowledge. In his “Notes Towards a Deformed Humanities,” Sample examines an additional frame to the notions of building and sharing that undergird the humanities, digital or otherwise. Destroying things, Sample proposes, is “a complementary mode of learning and research that is precisely the opposite of building things.”⁵⁸ As such, Sample suggests we embrace “a theory and practice of a deformed humanities. A humanities born of broken, twisted things . . . a piece of paper contorted into an object of startling insight and beauty.”⁵⁹ However, deformance, Sample notes, is “a key methodology of the branch of digital humanities that focus on text analysis and data-mining.”⁶⁰ He cites Ramsay’s work in *Reading Machines*, linking digital humanities to deformance – “taking apart a text – say, by focusing on only the nouns in an epic poem or calculating the frequency of collocations between character names in novels.”⁶¹ Jesse Stommel raises a similar issue when he states, “Digital humanities is about breaking stuff.”⁶² The key concept emerging here is that knowledge is produced by the act of dismantling. We might view the results as radical, emancipatory acts that free new forms of knowledge from the persistent forms in which they are trapped, just as the ideal of decolonization offers hope of how a change in episteme may be possible. Thus it is through breaking – as well as building – that digital humanities produces knowledge and the questions we must ask to understand the relationship between hack and yack and how it might be marshaled in service of liberatory ends.

CODA: THE CHALLENGES OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY

A final dimension to consider about the relationship between digital humanities and postcolonial studies is how fields are built and the challenges that both postcolonial studies and digital humanities have faced in the consolidation of their fields.

Constructing a field necessarily entails provisional, collective agreement on a set of values to achieve critical mass. Therefore, we might understand the act of defining the digital humanities as an echo of Gayatri Spivak's early work on strategic forms of essentialism, the "strategic use of essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest."⁶³ It is through strategic essentialism that we can provisionally accept the limits of a shared label, in exchange for the recognition and power that it accords. Yet, at the same time, we understand the limitations of embracing strategic essentialism: the erasures enacted by recourse to a singular label, the unbuilding inhered in the act of building. Any attempt at collectivity, particularly within an interdisciplinary field, produces a tension between sacrifice of difference and the pursuit of expediency. Debates within postcolonial studies – whether the definition of "postcolonial," the applicability of postcolonial thought to different national contexts, or the relationship between discourse and the material – reflect the limitations of naming and defining a body of work. However, arising from such limits are productive avenues of scholarship that keep moving the field forward. Similarly, debates within digital humanities arise from the fraught task of definition. Kirschenbaum has elaborated on the difficulties of defining digital humanities, more recently in his third in a series of essays on the term "digital humanities." He suggests that what is called "digital humanities" is a discursive construct perpetuated through blogs and social media.⁶⁴ As Ramsay suggests, building (of community) is an imperative in the digital humanities. Yet, the ideal of a built digital humanities community is contravened by the material realities of a field *built* on the same elements that shape all fields: "money, students, funding agencies, big schools, little schools, programs, curricula, old guards, new guards gatekeepers, and prestige."⁶⁵ That is to say, for all the dubiously idyllic notions of community, collaboration, and niceness its scholars tend to embrace, the digital humanities must operate within the constraints that shape academia writ large. Therefore, the question of (self-) definition is one with which digital humanities, like any interdisciplinary field, must grapple.

For digital humanists, debates on building exacerbate the anxieties that circulate around strategic acts of essentialism required to consolidate a new field. As the digital humanities has received unprecedented attention within the humanities,⁶⁶ the questions of where the limits of the field are, who's "in," and what "counts" as digital humanities are especially keen. When Ramsay revisits these questions in the follow-up piece "On Building," he addresses these anxieties, though not with the intention of allaying them. Rather, he reiterates that the unifying factor among digital humanities scholarship – regardless of the domain of knowledge influencing the work – is "moving from reading and critiquing to building and making."⁶⁷ From this post emerges a core – but debatable – tenet of digital humanities: reading an object as a text is a different experience than creating an object or a text. The act of building produces knowledge that could not be gained without an act of making: hacking, creating, building, marking up, coding.

In our contemporary moment, digital humanities occupies a similar position that postcolonial studies and other emergent, theoretically inflected or identity-based fields encountered during the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s. The fields raise fear of whether close reading would be sacrificed for more politically expedient frames of analysis or the sacredness of the text would be profaned by new methodologies. Such a link emphasizes the radical moves that postcolonial studies and digital humanities

have made as new frames of analysis, despite the radical differences between them. Their interdisciplinarity offers both the possibilities of multidimensional scholarship as well as the pitfalls of navigating the boundaries between disciplines. Yet, as we continue to probe the points of contact between postcolonial thought and the digital humanities, we will find more ways to productively negotiate the relationship between theory and praxis offered by each.

ENDNOTES

1. The term “postcolonial digital humanities” was coined by Adeline Koh and me in 2013 and disseminated through the Twitter hashtag “#dhpoco.” Our intention was to identify and build a community of scholars within digital humanities, new media studies, science and technology studies, and rhetoric and composition whose work engaged with postcolonial theory. Responses to the term have ranged from excitement to derision, but interest in postcolonial digital humanities has remained steady. In addition to the 2014 and 2015 MLA Conventions, both the South Asian Literary Studies Association and Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC) conferences have included panels on the relationship between digital humanities and postcolonial studies. HILT (Humanities Intensive Learning and Teaching) 2015 included the course Post/De/Colonial Digital Humanities. A number of articles in the *Differences* 25.1 special issue “In the Shadow of the Digital Humanities” engaged with the question of whether the role of difference – race, class, gender, sexuality, ability – is adequately addressed within digital humanities scholarship, citing an open thread on the topic that appeared on the #dhpoco website and generated much debate. *Journal of Victorian Culture* 19.3 included a forum on postcolonial digital archives, while a forthcoming issue of the journal *Ada* picks up on themes of postcolonial digital humanities by examining the relationship between gender, technology, and globalization.
2. Two important examples are Deepika Bahri’s *Postcolonial Studies at Emory* and George P. Landow’s *The Postcolonial Web*, which featured entries on postcolonial writers, critics, and key theoretical concepts. These sites were aimed primarily at advanced undergraduate and graduate students and played an important role in how postcolonial studies has been defined since the 1990s. While Landow’s site is now dormant, Bahri’s was updated and revamped in 2012.
3. In her work within science and technology studies, Sandra Harding has long made the case for putting postcolonial studies, feminist theory, and science and technology studies in conversation with each other. Such a combination, Harding proposes, allows scholars to rethink narratives of technological development centered on the “West,” in terms of theory and praxis. To do so is to revisit scientific traditions from non-Western cultures with an eye to the perspectives offered in other knowledge traditions. Moreover, it enables an examination of how both imperialism and colonialism have shaped value within scientific discourse. In her work, Harding makes the case for multicultural approaches to science. Emerging out of science and technology studies is an approach to postcolonial computing. Developed by Lilly Irani, Janet Vertesi, Paul Dourish, Kavita Philip, and Rebecca Grinter, “postcolonial computing” responds to developments in Human-Computer Interaction for Development (HCI4D), a scholarly community addressing the intersections of technology and development. Irani et al. frame their critique of development within HCI4D in terms of postcolonial discourse, to underscore the vexing questions of authority, power, and legitimacy evoked in the rhetoric of development. In contrast to development-focused engagement, postcolonial computing offers an alternative lens on designing and analyzing technology. It foregrounds the dynamics of culture and power subtending design

practices, arguing in favor of the particular over the universal. Postcolonial computing emphasizes cultural specificities to challenge more general presumptions about “good” design practices. As human–computer interaction has become more of a global phenomenon, the idea that design aesthetics or systems are universal has been called into question. To understand this phenomenon, Irani et al. propose that postcolonial approaches to science and technology studies offers insight on how cultural encounters and their colonial dimensions shape technology design. By invoking a *postcolonial* approach to computing, they decenter the primacy of “Western” forms of knowledge in favor of a localized approach that broaches cross-cultural engagement with awareness of the effects of uneven development on design.

4. Syed Mustafa Ali has used the term “decolonial computing” to offer another alternative. He grounds decolonial computing in critiques of social contract theory raised by Charles Mills and decolonial theories of the Global South articulated by Walter Dignolo among others. Ali argues that even in progressive approaches to computing, such as “postcolonial computing,” insufficient attention has been paid to the role of systemic racism and white supremacy, which Mills argues subtends the social contract. Ali’s problems with postcolonial computing lie in their embrace of postcolonial theory, which Ali argues is unconsciously Eurocentric and privileges a culture of political economy and therefore fails to theorize racial materiality. By embracing decolonial thought in his approach to computing, Ali suggests that decolonial computing works from the peripheries, not the European center, and foregrounds the possibilities of delinking and the border, with emphasis on embodiment and situatedness. To exemplify the possibilities of decolonial computing, he considers artificial intelligence, asking the decolonial question of humanoid robots – what is the role of race in the making of faces for humanoid robots – are humanoid robots masking important questions about race by virtue of their design? While Ali’s articulation of “decolonial computing” is relatively new, it builds on his work on the relationship between critical race theory and technology and offers a new dimension to thinking through the questions of power that computing engenders.
5. Radhika Gajjala’s work in *Cyberculture and the Subaltern*, for example, examines silence and voice online, engaging with the intersections of globalization and technology as a frame of analysis. Pramod Nayar’s work on digital dalits also examines the relationship between subalternity and cyberspace. Maria Fernandez has articulated the concept of “postcolonial media theory” in efforts to recoup the under-explored relationship between postcolonial studies and electronic media.
6. Examples range from *Bichitra: Online Tagore Variorium*, which digitizes Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore’s writing; Kavita Daiya’s *1947.org*, a collection of oral histories of India’s Partition; and Alex Gil’s *Around Digital Humanities in 80 Days*, which articulates a map of the global digital humanities with entries showcasing the rich and varied nature of digital humanities projects around the world.
7. There have been important interventions in questions of race, gender, ethnicity, and other categories of difference in digital humanities. These include several articles in *Debates in Digital Humanities* (2012), edited by Matthew K. Gold: Alan Liu’s arguments in favor of cultural critique in digital humanities, Tara McPherson’s work that suggests the racial biases underlying the development of UNIX and other technologies have led to the digital humanities being white, and Amy Earhart’s suggestion that the affordances of digital technology have enabled recovery work in African American studies. In spite of these examples, digital humanities tends to privilege canonical writers – a direct result of the fact that much of the data available for study itself reflects canonicity – and more work remains to be done to diversify the field.
8. The definition of “digital humanities” is a contested one. In its broadest articulation, which I am evoking here, digital humanities is an umbrella term for a range of approaches

- bridging humanistic inquiry and technology that are variously called humanities computing, corpus linguistics, computers and writing, and new media studies.
9. Walter Mignolo's critique of postcolonial studies questions its relationship to continental philosophy, arguing that its Eurocentrism domesticates its political content. His work on decolonial theory makes the case for delinking critiques of imperialism from European frameworks to create space for other knowledges, perspectives, and epistemologies.
 10. "Building," "making," and "doing" constitute forms of praxis in digital humanities.
 11. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's book *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986) outlines the psychological violence of colonialism and its effects on the mind. He differentiates between the physical subjugation of the colonial enterprise, which took the shape of law, policing, and embodied violence, and the psychic subjugation effected through education systems and suppression of local languages.
 12. Stephen Ramsay, "Who's In and Who's Out." <http://stephenramsay.us/text/2011/01/08/whos-in-and-whos-out/>
 13. Ibid.
 14. Roopika Risam and Adeline Koh, "Postcolonial Digital Humanities." <http://dhpoco.org>
 15. Anne Burdick, Johanna Drucker, Peter Lunenfeld, Todd Presner, and Jeffrey Schnapp, *Digital Humanities* (Cambridge: MIT, 2012), 122.
 16. Bethany Nowviskie, "On the Origin of 'Hack' and 'Yack.'" <http://nowviskie.org/2014/on-the-origin-of-hack-and-yack/>
 17. Geoffrey Rockwell, "Inclusion in the Digital Humanities." <http://www.philosophi.ca/pmwiki.php/Main/InclusionInTheDigitalHumanities>
 18. "Epistemology of Building" is a concept developed by Ramsay and Rockwell to articulate a materialist epistemology that locates the role of building in scholarly activity.
 19. Rockwell, "Inclusion in the Digital Humanities."
 20. Matt Bouchard, "Re: On Building." <http://stephenramsay.us/text/2011/01/11/on-building/>
 21. Kathi Inman Berens, "Building the 'About': Coding Changes How and What I Teach." <http://kathiiberens.com/2011/07/20/building-the-about-coding-changes-how-what-i-teach/>
 22. Ryan Heuser, "Re: On Building." <http://stephenramsay.us/text/2011/01/11/on-building/>
 23. Ibid.
 24. Ibid.
 25. Tom Scheinfeldt, "Where's the Beef." <http://foundhistory.org/2010/05/wheres-the-beef-does-digital-humanities-have-to-answer-questions/>
 26. Such critiques have been made by postcolonial scholars including Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik. In his book *In Theory* (1992), Ahmad criticizes postcolonial scholars who have wedded their work to poststructuralist theory instead of Marxism. He suggests that such formulations of postcolonial studies become ideologies of their own that privilege the interests of the postcolonial bourgeoisie and American and Western European intellectuals. In *The Postcolonial Aura* (1998), Dirlik proposes that postcolonial studies risks its own credibility if it ignores the effects and outcomes of the history of colonization on our contemporary moment in favor of discursive formulations of power alone.
 27. Drilling down from the surface of digital humanities reveals a complex network of power relations that enable the field to exist. These may include the various forms of labor that help produce a project and how credit is distributed among professors, project directors, #alt-ac staff, librarians, and graduate students. Beyond the academy, the very technologies with which digital humanities projects engage are deeply implicated in questions about the relationship between globalization and technology. For example, these technologies are produced under a range of labor practices, some of which are exploitative and engage low-wage labor in the Global South. They may also discourage local development through brain drain, typified by the waves of Indian IT workers brought to the United States on H1B visas.

28. Tom Scheinfeldt has noted a trend among new digital humanists: “One of the things people often notice when they enter the field of digital humanities is how nice everybody is.” This ideology of niceness is an element of digital humanities exceptionalism, a sense that the field is not fraught with many of the negative qualities that others are. Accordingly, in “Why Digital Humanities Is Nice,” he notes, “This can be in stark contrast to other (unnamed) disciplines where suspicion, envy, and territoriality sometimes seem to rule.” The role of niceness in digital humanities has been questioned. In “Introduction: Theory and the Virtues of Digital Humanities,” Natalia Cecire notes that niceness is just one of a set of ground rules for the digital humanities and it is easy to be “nice” when “one is not routinely met with casual racism . . . and the costs of niceness – and of refusing to be nice – are distributed unevenly across race, gender, class, academic status and rank, and other social factors.” Matthew Kirschenbaum has suggested that “niceness” is contravened by “asymmetry of networked relationships” in “The (DH) Stars Come Out in LA.” Meanwhile, Liz Losh has proposed that “generosity” may be a better intellectual framework than “niceness” in “Respect, Niceness, and Generosity.”
29. Matthew Kirschenbaum, “Hello Worlds.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 23, 2009. <http://chronicle.com/article/Hello-Worlds/5476>
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Matthew Kirschenbaum, *Mechanics: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (Cambridge: MIT, 2012), 11.
38. Johanna Drucker, “Performative Materiality and Theoretical Approaches to Interface.” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 7.1 (2013). <http://digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/7/1/000143/000143.html>
39. *AroundDH* is available at <http://arounddh.org>
40. Terras’s *Quantifying Digital Humanities* infographic is available at <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/dh/2012/01/20/infographic-quantifying-digital-humanities/>
41. The phrase “The empire writes back” originates in Salman Rushdie’s statement in *The (London) Times* that “the empire writes back to the center.” Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin developed this idea further to theorize the work of postcolonial writers “writing back” to the center in an attempt to reshape power dynamics delineating between center and periphery.
42. Bruno Latour, “An Attempt at a Compositionist Manifesto.” *New Literary History* 41 (2010): 475.
43. Kathy Inman Berens and Brian Croxall, “Building Digital Humanities in the Undergraduate Classroom.” <http://www.briancroxall.net/buildingDH/>
44. Jean Bauer, “Who You Calling Untheoretical.” *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1.1 (2011). <http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-1/who-you-calling-untheoretical-by-jean-bauer/>
45. Jentery Sayers and John Simpson, “Minimal Computing.” <http://www.globaloutlookdh.org/minimal-computing/>
46. Mark Sample, “Notes Towards a Deformed Humanities.” <http://www.samplereality.com/2012/05/02/notes-towards-a-deformed-humanities/>
47. Natalia Cecire, “Introduction: Theory and the Virtues of Digital Humanities.” *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1.1 (2011). <http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-1/introduction-theory-and-the-virtues-of-digital-humanities-by-natalia-cecire/>
48. Alan Liu, “Re: On Building.” <http://stephenramsay.us/text/2011/01/11/on-building/>

49. Mark Marino, "Re: On Building." <http://stephenramsay.us/text/2011/01/11/on-building/>
50. Miriam Posner, "Some Things to Think About Before You Exhort Everyone to Code." <http://miriamposner.com/blog/some-things-to-think-about-before-you-exhort-everyone-to-code/>
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CHAPTER TWENTY

SUBALTERN ARCHIVES, DIGITAL HISTORIOGRAPHIES



Angel David Nieves and Siobhan Senior

A critical project among scholars who have convened around the movement calling itself #dhpoco is what we might call subaltern archives – digital projects devoted to “history from below.” These projects are anti-elite, anti-colonial, and anti-essentialist; they are concerned with questions of representation, identity, modernization, and power. As facilitators of subaltern archives, we retain the hope that digital technologies can represent and empower marginalized groups committed to social and political change. Far from naively celebrating the digital realm, however, we find it to be a powerful terrain for working through persistent questions of power and access.

Subaltern Studies has been particularly concerned, on the one hand, to recover histories of revolt and resistance normally excluded from official archives and, on the other, to provide a rigorous accounting of how subjects are constituted *by* power even as they resist it. As scholars who tend to lean more heavily on the side of recognizing marginalized people’s agency, we appreciate the argument that “power needs to be located in the spatial and temporal realities of social activities, and [that] this requires a disaggregation and examination of the processes through which it is produced, exercised, limited and appropriated.”¹ For us, digital sites constitute new spatial and temporal activities within which colonial power can be disaggregated and examined. Whereas subaltern readings have had to take place “against the grain,” as it were, of traditional print and paper archives and historiography, digital sites can be living documents allowing continual revision, contest, and expansion and thus the inclusion of ever more voices and perspectives.²

We aspire to decolonize online spaces and technologies by building archives devoted to insurgent histories, by collaborating with marginalized groups in that building, and by learning how such groups build their own archives in the first place. At the same time, we try to stay attuned to the ways in which such efforts remain vulnerable to co-optation or, in some cases, to cessation. In this essay, we describe two sites. *Writing of Indigenous New England* is a crowd-sourced, online anthology of literature produced by the first peoples of this region, from before the so-called first contact to the present.³ *The Virtual Freedom Trail Project* documents the physical spaces (houses, apartments, offices, meeting places) used in Tanzania during the struggle against South African apartheid.⁴

At first glance, this analysis seems like an unusual geographic and disciplinary juxtaposition, but both projects target huge erasures in dominant discourses and dominant archives. Both sites aim to create space for histories that have been assiduously preserved by specific communities, yet rendered invisible by colonial archives and discourses. Both bear witness to the variety of strategies that communities traumatized by colonialism have used and still use to remember their past and prepare for the future. And both document micro-geographies of resistance to colonial violence, whether that resistance appears in action, in built forms, or in *story*. These are all affective processes of memory-making and imagining future possibilities through digital technologies.

New England and Tanzania, for us, are representative of places worldwide that have been construed as lacking in subaltern resistance and survival. But forgetting those histories of resistance is politically problematic for many reasons, primarily because it denies the potential for building broader cultures of democracy. How, we ask, can (always) emergent digital archives help challenge such assumptions? And how, we ponder, can our two disciplines contribute to the building of such archives? Granting that there is no “pure” academic field from which to launch subaltern projects, how might literature and architectural history, among other disciplines, make space for subaltern voices?⁵

WRITING OF INDIGENOUS NEW ENGLAND: AGAINST REGIONAL HISTORY AND CANONICAL LITERATURE (SIOBHAN SENIER)

Writing of Indigenous New England has grown out of a print anthology that is itself an attempt to decolonize the archive. *Dawnland Voices: An Anthology of Indigenous Writing from New England* (2014), nearly 700 pages long, includes the writing of 11 tribal nations, from the Mi'kmaq of northern Maine and the Maritimes to the Schaghticoke of southern Connecticut. It ranges from some of the earliest pictographs and English-language political petitions to present-day poetry, fiction, and blogs. It seeks to decolonize the archive in two ways: first, by asserting the *continuous presence* of Native American people and writing; second, by decolonizing the very process of anthologizing.

The myth of the vanishing Indian exercises special force in New England, the location of Puritan arrival and therefore of U.S. national origin myths. That force, in turn, owes a great deal to colonial history and archives. Jill Lepore, for example, has traced how the earliest Puritan historians narrated (and re-narrated) King Philip's War (1675–1676) as the effective “end” of Native presence in the northeast. Jean O'Brien (Ojibwe) pursues this colonial project through eighteenth- and nineteenth-century town histories in her aptly titled *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England*. Year after year, O'Brien finds, local historians eulogized “the last of the tribe” – so enthusiastically and consistently, in fact, that they created a landscape “thickly populated by ‘last’” members of a given “race” (113).⁶ These suppositions continue to the present day, where regional Native people face the supposition that they no longer really exist, or that those who would assert their heritage and rights are merely “casino-grubbing.” Historians like Lepore, O'Brien, and Colin Calloway have attempted to correct these legacies from within

their own discipline. In gathering the writing of indigenous people themselves, however, *Dawnland Voices* provides an alternative archive, one that documents Native people's persistence and survival.

Literary anthologies carry a heavy burden of taste- and nation-making; by their very nature, these tomes make lofty claims to represent what Matthew Arnold famously calls "the best that has been thought and said." Standard classroom texts like the *Norton Anthology of World Literature* purport to give comprehensive coverage of Great Works that have withstood the Test of Time; the *Best American Poetry* series implies the highest standards of taste, and yokes those standards to national pride. Thus, Karen Kilcup, herself a thoughtful anthologist, has said there is no escaping this central fact: "an anthology creates a miniature canon, no matter how resistant the editor is to the vexed notions of goodness and importance."⁷ *Dawnland Voices* pushed back against this impulse to fix categories of taste and value in print. It redistributed the evaluation of literary value to a much wider range of people than the usual editorial team or individual – and made this evaluation an ongoing process. Compiled by a team of a dozen tribal editors and coordinated by Siobhan Senior, *Dawnland Voices* reevaluated what falls under the broad rubric of world literature. The community editors are highly regarded scholars and knowledge keepers, including archivist Joan Avant (Wampanoag), tribal historic preservation officer Donald Soctomah (Passamaquoddy), literary historian Lisa Brooks (Abenaki), linguist Stephanie Fielding (Mohegan), and others. They used highly variable, community-specific methods of gathering and soliciting their materials – sometimes consulting with family members, sometimes with tribal councils; sometimes soliciting new writings through tribal newsletters, and sometimes vetting the proposed writings through formal committees.

As we prepared *Dawnland Voices* to go to press, we began to feel the limitations of the print medium. Averaging only 50 pages per tribal nation, the book barely scratched the surface of the wealth of writing that regional Native people had produced: historic petitions; letters and diaries; tribal newsletters and periodicals; recipes; oral histories and children's stories; memoirs, poetry, fiction, and plays. Nor could a print volume reflect the new knowledge about these texts and writers that was continually emerging in the process of talking with tribal members about them: recollections of how a tribal newsletter ran out of funding, for instance, or which poems have been recited at powwows over the years, or how non-Native editors and scholars affected the production of a particular book. Nor, finally, could a print volume really represent the state of tribal archives. Most tribal communities do *have* archives of their own, although they may be in a variety of preservation and access situations: some, like the Mohegan Tribal Archives in Connecticut, are basically private; others, like the Tomaquag Indian Museum in Rhode Island, seek to be public with tribal control, but lack funding. Still others, like a wide range of tribal offices, have impromptu collections of filing cabinets catalogued more or less in the heads of individual historic preservation officers; and still other individual elders retain shoeboxes, attics, and garages full of family photographs and tribal letters, documents that are vastly uninventoried and unprotected.

Digital collections, we considered, are living documents in some ways not unlike oral histories: they can be expanded, amended, and contested. They can increase access to particular stories and materials, help preserve those stories in different

forms and make new visions and questions possible. And they can prompt the creation of new cultural heritage material in the form of community annotation and response. Therefore, we began to extend the work of *Dawnland Voices* to *Writing of Indigenous New England*. This began as a pedagogical project: Siobhan Senier enlisted her students to research and write brief introductions to the work of regional Native authors, partnering students with living authors (for contemporary literature courses) or with tribal historians and/or local historical societies (for earlier literature courses). Local historical societies and scholars at other institutions have begun to express interest in partnering on this project.⁸

The most successful exhibit to date is *Along the Basket Trail*, a partnership with the Mt. Kearsarge Indian Museum in Warner, New Hampshire. To consider baskets as “texts” is already to decolonize canons of alphabetic literacy and primacy. The Mt. Kearsarge Museum had already staged a traveling exhibit of its remarkable collection of northeastern indigenous baskets and wanted a digital exhibit to record it. Even better, the curators conceived this exhibit from the beginning as crowd-sourced. While they were drawing from their own collections, they also held “Out of the Attic” days, when they encouraged local residents to bring in baskets they had in their homes – a la *Antiques Road Show* – for assessment with an expert in Abenaki baskets. The curators understood, then, that museum collections do not tell the whole story, that many items wind up in personal collections, and contain personal stories about their origins. UNH students helped translate the traveling exhibit to the online platform, actively consulting with local basketmakers and tribal historians as they wrote up the exhibit text. In this mutually beneficial model, tribal artists and historians, who did not have the time or resources to build corrective online exhibits themselves, got help in doing so, while students got real-life writing and research experience.⁹

Writing of Indigenous New England owes a great deal to indigenous digital heritage projects that have come before it.¹⁰ Most of them pursue “digital repatriation,” whereby libraries, museums, and other heritage institutions create electronic surrogates of original materials, which are then theoretically available to the source communities that created them. For example, at *Gibagadinamaagoom* (an Ojibwe word meaning “to bring to life, to sanction, to give permission”) a birchbark drawing of a thunderbird, from collections at the American Philosophical Society, is surrounded by the voices of Ojibwe knowledge-keepers. Instead of the usual thumbnail images, metadata, and explanatory captions, the site yields to elders telling “their own history, in their own language, and on their own cultural terms.”¹¹ The *Yale Indian Papers Project* (YIPP), meanwhile, addresses the problem in New England Indian historiography mentioned above: the relentless re-narrating of Indian disappearance, even when there exist primary documents that tell a different story. YIPP is building a massive database of high-quality, open-access facsimiles and annotated transcriptions in close consultation with tribal community members. Paul Grant-Costa and his colleagues explain:

we . . . recognize that we cannot speak for all the disciplines that have a stake in our work, nor do we represent the perspective of Native people themselves. . . . Consultants’ annotations might include Native origin stories, oral sources, and traditional beliefs while also including Euro-American original sources of the same historical event or phenomena, thus offering two kinds of narratives of the past.¹²

In these projects, close consultation with indigenous people and space for indigenous interpretation are key. Everybody working in this area owes a huge debt to the anthropologist Kimberly Christen, a leader in the international conversation around digital repatriation. Originally working with an Australian Aboriginal community to create a digital catalog of photographs and video taken during her fieldwork, Christen found that tribal members had a complex rubric for what images should be shared, and with whom: some were open to all; others were meant for specific kin groups; still others should be made available only to people with particular ritual knowledge. Christen translated this model – this ability to complicate the usual dichotomies of public/private, open/closed – into Mukurtu, a content-management system that allows communities to establish their own protocols for sharing, viewing, and curating materials. She says:

If the colonial idea of the archive was to collect and store the world's treasures for the betterment of mankind, this emerging . . . archive is part of an intimate set of kinship relations and a dynamic socioterritorial network that rubs up against national territorial boundaries and legal structures aimed at protecting indigenous culture.¹³

Tribal protocols and relations, rather than the demands of the settler gaze, structure these post or (anti-) colonial archives.

As we discuss at the end of this essay, conversations around intellectual property are still only a first step in decolonizing digital archives. Many of the biggest and best-funded projects to date center on indigenous collections held by *non*-Native institutions. They sidestep the simple fact that most tribal people *have* archives of their own, and that they *want* to digitize much of this information in the interest of disseminating it more broadly to tribal members – including younger tribal members and people living off-reservation – as well as to the general public. The invisibility of tribal stories and tribal ways of knowing and keeping stories is an ongoing concern, even on the “open” Web. So while Native people *will* ensure that their cultural patrimony is protected, we still need a larger conversation about redistributing some of the basic material resources for archives and digitization.

**THE VIRTUAL FREEDOM TRAIL PROJECT:
ARCHIVING WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO
THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA (ANGEL DAVID NIEVES)**

First announced in 2005¹⁴ and unveiled in 2011, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) funded “Roads to Independence: African Liberation Heritage Programme” marked the fiftieth anniversary of liberation from colonial rule in Tanzania and the onset of a wave of freedom for African countries across the continent. The project in question was

an acknowledgement of the importance of liberation movements to the process of decolonization of the continent as well as the role played by Tanzania in providing material and moral support to the liberation movements which led to the struggle for independence in southern Africa.¹⁵

The project would initially focus on Tanzania and the SADC (Southern African Development Community) countries whose liberation movements were based in Tanzania during the struggles against colonization. Those countries supported by Tanzania during the liberation struggle included Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Critical to the success of the program were the dual goals of sustaining research into the complex history of the liberation struggle across southern (and eastern) Africa and the ability to build the capacity of heritage professionals in the “strategic management and presentation of Africa’s liberation heritage.”¹⁶ In Tanzania, efforts to begin the process of identifying, surveying, recording, and documenting sites also resulted from the passage of the Ministry of Natural Resources, Division of Antiquities 2008 Cultural Heritage Policy. As noted in one of the first reports issued by the Ministry in 2010, resulting from support provided by the Swedish National Heritage Board (and only coincidentally resulting from UNESCO’s proposed Liberation Heritage Route),

[i]t is upon this legal, administrative framework and custodianship that the Division of Antiquities decided to undertake studies aiming at identification, documentation and dissemination of African Liberation Heritage sites to enable their legal protection and conservation for present and future generations.¹⁷

As a result of my own oral history research in South Africa, surrounding the events of June 16th, 1976, and the subsequent deaths of countless students at the

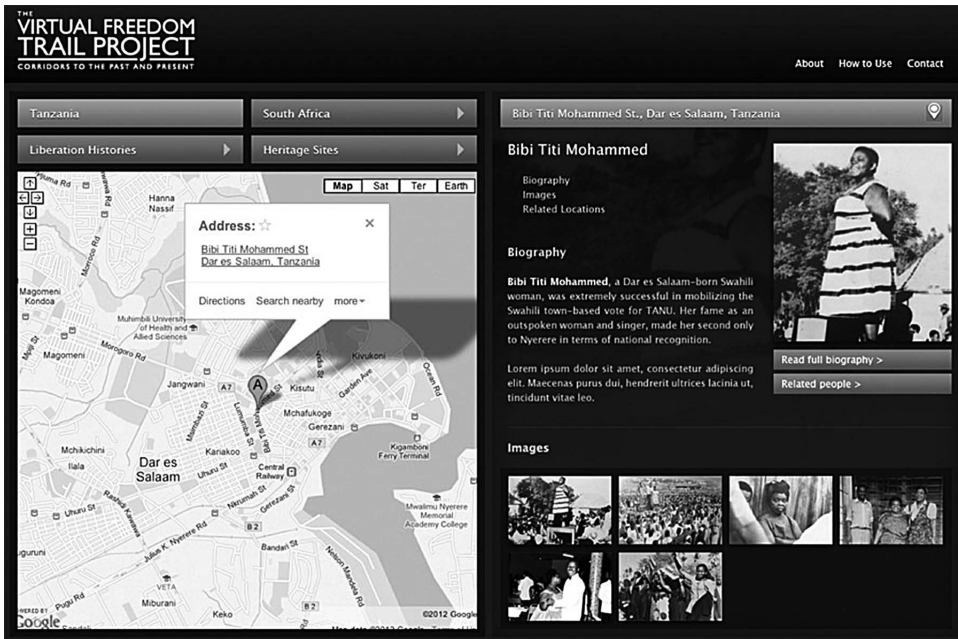


Figure 20.1 From *The Virtual Freedom Trail Project*.
Open Source: <http://www.dhinitiative.org/projects/vftp>

hands of the apartheid government, I became aware of Tanzania's role in providing a safe harbor for young men and women from Johannesburg's Soweto township. After some discussion with a colleague at Hamilton College, it became clear to us that a project was desperately needed. We decided that through a unique cross-disciplinary partnership – between a women's studies scholar (Jaksch) who was a subject expert on women and social movements in Tanzania, and an architectural historian (myself) – we could address the uneven portrayal of women in this complex history. We designed *The Virtual Freedom Trail Project* (VFTP) to document the participation of Tanzanian women in the anti-apartheid struggle and to engage its very subjects in the co-production of the archive, the better to investigate the silences in existing historical scholarship, contemporary political discourses, nationalist histories, and the archive itself. Using geospatial technologies and ethnographic field research, this archive reveals a rich network of spaces and places related to liberation movements occurring across sub-Saharan Africa.

The Virtual Freedom Trail uses a unique mapping application to provide both broad and specific access to the historical records and places that tell the story of the struggles for freedom in both Tanzania and South Africa. At its broadest scale, this interface provides users with an enhanced map, offering a number of useful, pre-selected features that allow users to focus their interest on either Tanzania or South Africa, or onto specific locations that serve as important liberation histories or heritage sites.

From there, the map will provide access to individual locations, both through clickable map “pins” or a list of locations and related people in a central column. Once a user selects one of these locations or topics, the interface will adapt and display a rich database record of various multimedia information about their selection. These media will include, at least, biographies, images, relevant locations associated with the record, and links to similar or related database entries. This interface is designed to provide both specific, targeted searches, and general browsing and explorability of the large dataset that makes up the *Virtual Freedom Trail's* project archive. The initial work has raised much interest in Tanzania, but it is delayed pending development of a suitable platform and host for the project.

The VFTP, begun in 2009 in Tanzania and South Africa, may well be seen as an analogue to similar efforts in the development of heritage routes and corridors such as these across the United States. The United States, itself emerging from centuries of gender, racial, and ethnic inequality, is now actively embracing a heritage of diversity – memorializing as it has the Civil Rights Movement with the National Park Service's *Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement* and the *Alabama Black Heritage History Trail*, and likewise, American feminism with the *Women's Rights National Historical Park* in Seneca Falls, New York. In the past decade, historic sites of the Civil Rights Movement and heritage tourism have emerged across the U.S. South. Numerous state and local counties have begun to actively commemorate their unique civil rights histories.

The VFTP examines postcolonial history in Tanzania and its critical relationship with South Africa, including the almost 20-year period of exile of many young South Africans to Tanzania. Beginning in the 1960s, Tanzania played a leading role in the pan-African struggle for continent-wide independence, providing a safe-haven for anti-apartheid activists with then President Julius Nyerere committed to solidarity

with other African liberation movements. While there had been waves of South African exiles secretly making their way out of South Africa to Tanzania for decades, it was not until the Student Uprisings in 1976 that a massive influx of exiles – mostly youth – arrived in Tanzania. With the growing number of exiles there it was decided that schools and training centers needed to be established in Tanzania. Little has been documented about the many youth that fled South Africa to receive educational and vocational training in unique, largely self-reliant model communities there. Significantly, the use of new media and information technologies connecting Tanzania to the history of South Africa's struggle against apartheid has not yet been implemented.

While the stories of the struggles of anti-apartheid resistance in South Africa have become more widely known and celebrated, the contributions of an economically beleaguered Tanzania remain mostly invisible. Scholars have widely accepted the notion that the lack of extant archival sources in Tanzania is due to political restrictions originating in South Africa placed on the ANC. Interestingly, ANC papers, minutes, plans, discussions, or resolutions in South Africa were almost always destroyed to prevent incriminating evidence from falling in the hands of the apartheid state. In Tanzania, however, many of the documents and papers related to the struggle against apartheid remain unknown to researchers simply because of a lack of resources for their conservation and promotion. A unique opportunity exists to begin the process of cataloguing these extant material artifacts, documents, and holdings from these schools and settlements. Through the VFTP project, exiles, of the South African and Tanzanian Diaspora, will no longer remain passive participants in the truth-telling process; they become actively enlisted participants and users in ways that were never previously possible before the advent of digital media.

In South Africa, the legacy of apartheid has meant a constant engagement with cultural trauma and its impact on all aspects of social life, particularly for township residents beginning in the early twentieth century. Few studies have considered the historical significance of South Africa's townships as extant physical artifacts of a difficult past; however, they now face the complex heritage issues and concurrent pressures of the international tourist market. Do the meaning and significance (as sites of trauma, for residents) of these planned communities defer to the competing interests of urban redevelopment, large-scale heritage planning, and globalization? In the face of a rapidly developing heritage market and a growing foreign tourism industry in South Africa, how might we address some of the similar issues we might encounter in an environment such as Tanzania where little tourist development has centered on the liberation struggle?

A blog post sent to me by a colleague reminded me that much of the work that we have been engaged in through collaboration with communities is what the Lesbian Herstory Archives calls "radical archiving."¹⁸ We can easily deconstruct and take issue with the term "radical," but in many ways those of us working at the intersections of archive-making, virtual world development, and historical reconstructions have grappled with a series of complex social justice issues while working within communities that have been adversely impacted by the work of architects and planners in service to the state. Apartheid planning and architecture were the direct results of serious human rights violations perpetuated by a state that was based entirely on racial violence against anyone other than those labeled "white." For many South African freedom fighters who escaped to Tanzania, alternative settlements, schools, and

training bases were opened across the country as a response to the spatial oppression they faced back home.

Between 1978 and 1992 several thousand young exiles studied, trained, and worked at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Tanzania. As a result of the 1976 Soweto Uprising many young men and women fled to urban centers across the continent seeking a place of refuge and new freedoms in countries sympathetic to the anti-apartheid struggle. In 1978 the Government of Tanzania gave the ANC two large tracts of farmland at Mazimbu and Dakawa near the city of Morogoro. Facilities were built for schooling (from nursery through adult education levels), for healthcare, farming, horticulture, small industries, sports, and administration. All of these facilities were built to support the social, political, and economic struggle against apartheid while also creating “an exceptionally wide support base, which in turn promoted the image and assisted the funding of the movement (ANC) as a whole.”¹⁹ Very few publications have discussed the direct influence school and settlement sites across Tanzania and elsewhere had on the many liberation movements against apartheid, colonialism, and imperialism beginning in 1960s and lasting to the 1990s. The international dimensions of the anti-apartheid struggle occurred across many sites in Europe and Africa. With the banning of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) in 1950 and the ban on liberation movements, more broadly, after the Sharpeville Massacre of March 1960, many people fled the country. Sean Morrow and Lyiso Pulumani’s 2004 publication *Education in Exile SOMAFSCO, The ANC School in Tanzania, 1978 to 1992* brought much attention to this little understood history.²⁰ Pethu Serote’s earlier article of 1993, “Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College: A Unique South African Educational Experience in Tanzania” provided an in-depth look at efforts to build uniquely alternative South African spaces within the boundaries of Nyerere’s African socialism.

In South Africa, over the past ten years, growing concern over the preservation of documents related to the liberation struggle of the 1970s against apartheid has spurred new theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical questions over the making of web-based archives for local community-based township museums. The VFTP proposes the potential for an African digital history to interrogate the conditions of life histories of human rights violations by examining those conditions for their “emancipatory potential and their capacity for instituting dialogical forms of historical consciousness between the testimony donors and possible communities of witness” on the Internet.²¹ In other words, can those stories about life under apartheid actually effect change among their viewership on the Internet? Can “radical archive” making act as a form of advocacy, alongside efforts to promote a form of restorative social justice?

As cultural studies scholar Chela Sandoval has argued in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, the world inhabited by wired, technologized, privileged subjects requires a shift in educational preparation and cultural expertise such that “the technologies developed by [and with] subjugated populations to negotiate this realm of shifting meanings can prove indispensable.”²² Placing various technologies in the hands of “subjugated populations” allows for new kinds of engagements to occur. The rise of network technologies has now allowed a diverse group of users to actively express and interrogate their racial, gendered, national, and class identities. We have seen the power of the Internet to transform the political, social, and economic future of a nation – for example, here in the US with Obama’s first election, with the many “Arab

Springs” that have occurred across the Middle East, and within countries across the African continent including Liberia, Rwanda, and South Africa. I see the emancipatory potential of the Internet and new digital technologies for disclosing as yet untold stories about the anti-apartheid movement which not only impacted South Africans, but which was a worldwide movement. In South Africa those post-apartheid identities have largely been mediated through what Deborah Posel sees as the “avowedly normative, officializing project of the truth commission [or Truth & Reconciliation Commission].”²³ This project was in some ways developed to address the failures of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission of the mid-1990s to adequately address the role of women in the struggle against apartheid – particularly those women and their historical agency about whom we (as outsiders to that story) know so little. Most recently, the field of e-Black Studies advocates social change, as outlined in its manifesto, where it states clearly: “We work to promote eBlack Studies as an interdisciplinary study of Black life and information communications technology across the African Diaspora based on an engaged model of praxis-centered, community advocacy.”²⁴

Black feminist scholarship during the past 30 years or so, I would argue, has made so many of us more conscious of the importance of letting women speak about their experiences as a legitimate way of questioning dominant paradigms of knowing and even unknowing. The popularity of oral histories, on the web, in recent years, reflects an attempt to capture the voices of immediate experiences, but as has been pointed out, many of these “so-called voices . . . are mediated (edited, translated, corrected) by ‘intellectuals’ working in the academy” or even in libraries and repositories already strapped for resources.²⁵ As seen across South Africa, resources are needed to preserve intangible heritage and even extant cultural heritage (artifacts, buildings, material objects, etc.), in part because of the unequal access of Black heritage professionals to digital projects such as the Liberation Heritage Route. White heritage professionals and historians retain their intellectual stranglehold over the reinterpretation of apartheid’s legacy and the history of Black spatial agency in the liberation movement.

The VFPT incorporates visual ethnographies, audio diaries/life histories, digital mapping, and archival evidence to create a dynamic virtual trail with resistance sites as complex living places. We are proposing a “network of nested multi-modal spatial narratives”²⁶ in relation to a thorough media-rich, interactive “map” of the accompanying historic site. These media-rich site maps feature details about each location within Tanzania and South Africa (and where applicable, in the United States) and are mapped and linked (or nested) to testimonies, inventories, bibliographies, scholarship, historic images/3D models, geospatial data (including GIS), texts, and audio. Clearly, this “mapping” is not intended to result in merely describing the geographic, topographic, and spatial features of resistance as it was manifested in several sites in Tanzania and South Africa. Rather, the goals of the project require that we utilize creative and innovative methodological approaches that will allow us a better, more complex understanding of what is commonly referred to as heritage resulting from state oppression and violence in post-conflict societies.

While we acknowledge that there are already a number of web-based oral history projects and archival collections on South Africa’s struggle against apartheid, no site currently attempts to incorporate Tanzania’s critical role (or the Diaspora) in the anti-apartheid movement through exile narratives.²⁷ For the VFPT, the historical experiences of struggle of the South African anti-apartheid movements will be

integrated into a larger region-wide study of resistance movements, alliances, solidarities, exile, and refugees in Tanzania.

I would also argue that the link between “human rights” and the preservation of cultural heritage resources – particularly those in the built environment – is often misunderstood. Nations must apologize and/or offer compensation for historical injustices if there is to be a process of healing and remembrance. If we are truly seeking social justice, we must remember these historical injustices and recognize how they continue to shape identities even today. Therefore, it is essential to understand cultural heritage resources as a part of peoples’ efforts to maintain and construct their own identity within a reconciliation process. Historic sites are critical elements in the struggle for equality and democracy, and new technologies can be used to increase access to the information kept in these important spaces. For example, the work of Edward Gonzalez-Tennant comes to mind with his efforts to “utilize new media to open (digital) spaces thus encouraging candid reflection on the connections between historical, face-to-face violence and present inequality.”²⁸ In recreating the historical development and destruction of Rosewood, Florida, culminating in the 1923 massacre and leveling of the town, Gonzalez-Tennant uses geographic information systems (or GIS) to provide a deeper contextualization of its history.

I would argue that new digital technologies can also help to challenge the ways one interprets and uses various forms of historical evidence and testimony concerning the legacy of apartheid. In particular, digital technologies can work to fill in those many absences in the historical record, particularly as they relate to everyday citizens and their roles in social movements across the Global South.

CONCLUSION: RESOURCES FOR THE 99 PERCENT

Subaltern archives are legion. The tiniest random sampling would include sites like Adeline Koh’s *Digitizing Chinese Englishmen*, Grace Yeh’s *The Re/Collecting Project*, and *The Bracero Archive*.²⁹ These archives illustrate that the subaltern emphatically *does* speak. The questions are: how do we map that speech? How do we read it? And – perhaps most pressingly, in this neoliberal era – how do we sustain it in the face of shrinking resources?

By way of conclusion, we reflect on existing DH funding mechanisms and power structures, and how these may replicate colonial patterns and colonial subjugation. As with physical archives, digital archives are seeing the emergence of a highly tiered system, with the lion’s share of the funding, resources, and visibility going to established and already well-endowed institutions. In the United States, while institutions like the APS and Yale can garner significant grants from entities like the National Endowment for the Humanities to launch these projects, smaller tribal and community collections still struggle in many cases just to get broadband access, hardware, and software, never mind long-term data curation and backup. In Africa, the majority of projects have been funded at large research universities in countries like South Africa with many resources going to the University of the Witwatersrand or the University of Pretoria with support from American foundations including Andrew W. Mellon or Andrew Carnegie.³⁰

We have seen this before. As Amy Earhart has shown, the 1990s saw a profusion of digital archives devoted to authors of color, in particular, many of which fell into

rapid obsolescence while DH funding and prestige seemed to retrench around canonical figures (e.g., Shakespeare, Petrarch, Jefferson) and “analytics.”³¹ It would seem, then, that the field’s privileging of “tool-building” and “more-hack-less-yack” has had the unfortunate effect of disenfranchising the communities that arguably need some of these tools the most. We haven’t seen much change since a decade ago, when Alondra Nelson, Alicia Headlam Hines, and Thuy Linh N. Tu wrote:

Most often when attention is turned to the implications of race for theorizing technology, people of color are cast as victims. . . . [U]nfortunately these accounts sometimes become rationalizations for why people of color fail to have “productive” relationships with technology, and justifications for the still uneven distribution of technological resources and knowledge. After all, if people of color are seen only as victims, then there is very little reason to entrust them with the tools of the future.³²

For us, subaltern digital projects have been steady prompts to ponder the sometimes productive, sometimes precarious relations between our own academic institutions and the communities we wish to learn from and support. We see the lion’s share of DH time, energy, and funding going to existing print archives in the most powerful institutions. There are some practical reasons for this: digitization is expensive and labor-intensive, and scanning and uploading materials that have already been professionally preserved and inventoried seems to provide the biggest bang for the buck. At the same time, we feel some frustration, although academics should by now be more attuned to the fact that archives do *have* politics.³³ As always, it seems, subaltern communities have had to take matters into their own hands. In her indispensable collection, *Archive Stories*, Antoinette Burton describes the emergence of

hundreds, perhaps thousands of . . . archive enterprises taken up by groups who believe that their histories have not been written because they have not been considered legitimate subjects of history – and hence of archivization per se. The fact that many of these archive entrepreneurs rely on the Internet as their storage space represents a tremendous challenge to the basic assumptions of archival fixity and materiality.³⁴

Thus, while we remain excited – on some days, positively optimistic – about the potential for digital archives to render subaltern voices and histories audible and visible, we also remain deeply concerned about the future of these projects. It is hard not to see higher education itself these days reinforcing rather than mitigating social inequalities. Where will DH finally cast its allegiances: with the 1 percent, or the 99?

ENDNOTES

1. K. Sivaramakrishnan, “Situating the Subaltern: History and Anthropology in the Subaltern Studies Project.” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 8.4 (December 1995): 395.
2. For an excellent introduction to subaltern reading strategies, see Ranajit Guha, ed., *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986–1995* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

3. <http://www.indigenousnewengland.com>, now re-titled and relocated at dawnlandvoices.org.
4. <http://www.virtualfreedomtrailproject.org/>
5. We mean explicitly to invoke Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous argument that such voice is always heavily mediated: "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), 271–313.
6. See Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Vintage, 1999); Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010): 113. See also Colin G. Calloway, ed., *After King Philip's War: Presence and Persistence in Indian New England* (Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 1997).
7. Karen Kilcup, "The Poetry and Prose of Recovery Work." In *On Anthologies: Politics and Pedagogy*, ed. Jeffrey DiLeo (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 113.
8. The site was initially set up with support from the James H. and Claire Short Hayes Chair in the Humanities, an internal grant at the University of New Hampshire. The National Endowment for the Humanities recently provided additional support for the work of training tribal historians in digitization methods. Partnering institutions as of this date include the Tomaquag Indian Memorial Museum (Rhode Island), the Passamaquoddy Cultural Preservation Office (Maine), and the Indigenous Resources Collective (Massachusetts).
9. For a more detailed account of the pedagogical stakes in this assignment, including how students were prepared for the work, see Siobhan Senior, "Indigenizing Wikipedia." In *Web Writing: Why & How for Liberal Arts Teaching & Learning*, ed. Jack Dougherty (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, forthcoming). Open access: <http://epress.trincoll.edu/webwriting/chapter/senier/>
10. A more detailed version of these next few paragraphs was previously published as "Digitizing Indigenous History: Trends and Challenges." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 19.3 (2014): 396–402.
11. Timothy Powell and Larry Aitken, "Encoding Culture: Building a Digital Archive Based on Traditional Ojibwe Teachings." In *The American Literature Scholar in the Digital Age*, ed. Amy E. Earhart and Andrew Jewell (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 250–274.
12. Paul Grant-Costa, Tobias Glaza, and Michael Sletcher, "The Common Pot: Editing Native American Materials." *Scholarly Editing* 33 (2012). <http://www.scholarlyediting.org/2012/essays/essay.commonpot.html>
13. Kimberly Christen, "Gone Digital: Aboriginal Remix and the Cultural Commons." *International Journal of Cultural Property* 12.3 (2005): 317.
14. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5459/>
15. <http://www.panorama.co.zw/index.php/archives/121-crossing-borders/202-african-liberation-heritage-project>
16. World Heritage Centre, *Roads to Independence: The African Liberation Heritage Programme* (New York: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2009), 3.
17. Cultural Heritage Development and Communication Section, Division of Antiquities, *Identification and Documentation of African Liberation Heritage Sites in Tanzania* (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, 2010), 1.
18. <http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/>
19. Sean Brown Maaba Morrow and Lyiso Pulumani, *Education in Exile: SOMAFSCO, the ANC School in Tanzania, 1978 to 1992* (Cape Town, South Africa: HSRC Press, 2004), 157.
20. Ibid.
21. Allen Feldman, "Memory Theaters, Virtual Witnessing, and the Trauma-Aesthetic." *Biography* 27.1 (2004): 164.

22. Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 176.
23. Deborah Posel, "History as Confession: The Case of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission." *Public Culture* 20.1 (2008): 119.
24. <http://blackstudies.org/workshop/manifesto.html>
25. Sneja Gunew, "Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct." In *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*, ed. Sneja Gunew (New York: Routledge, 1990), 23.
26. Marla Jaksch, "Mapping Differential Geographies: Women's Contributions to the Liberation Struggle in Tanzania." In *Global Perspectives on Gender and Space: Engaging Feminism and Development*, ed. Ann M. Oberhauser and Ibipo Johnston-Anumonwo (New York: Routledge, 2014), 155.
27. See, for instance, *The Nordic Documentation on the Liberation Struggle in South Africa* at <http://www.liberationafrica.se/> and *South Africa: Overcoming Apartheid, Building Democracy* at <http://overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/index.php>. Two additional sites – the *Digital Innovation South Africa Project* (DISA) (<http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/>) at the University of KwaZulu Natal and *Aluka* (<http://www.aluka.org/>), now a part of JSTOR – do not provide the media-rich content, interactive mapping, and the "nested spatial narratives" we are working to develop with our community collaborators.
28. Edward Gonzalez-Tennant, "New Heritage and Dark Tourism: A Mixed Methods Approach to Social Justice in Rosewood, Florida." *Heritage & Society* 6.1 (2013): 62.
29. <http://chineseenglishmen.adelinekoh.org/>; <http://reco.calpoly.edu/>; <http://braceroarchive.org/>
30. Keith Breckenridge, "The Politics of the Parallel Archive: Digital Imperialism and the Future of Record-Keeping in the Age of Digital Reproduction." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40.3 (2014): 499.
31. Amy Earhart, "Can Information Be Unfettered? Race and the New Digital Humanities Canon." In *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, ed. Matt Gold (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 309–318. <http://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/>
32. In Alondra Nelson, Thuy Linh N. Tu, and Alicia Headlam Hines, eds., *Technicolor: Race, Technology, and Everyday Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 3.
33. An argument that has been made repeatedly. See, for instance, Verne Harris, "The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory and Archives in South Africa." *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 63–86; and Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form." In *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, Raziah Saleh, and Jane Taylor (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), 83–100.
34. Antoinette Burton, *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 2.

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CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

IF FANON HAD HAD FACEBOOK

Postcolonial knowledge, rhizomes, and the gnosis of the digital



Adeline Koh

The Third World must start over a new history of man which takes account of not only the occasional prodigious theses maintained by Europe but also its crimes, the most heinous of which have been committed at the very heart of man, the pathological dismembering of his functions and the erosion of his unity, and in the context of the community, the fracture, the stratification and the bloody tensions fed by class, and finally, on the immense scale of humanity, the racial hatred, slavery, exploitation and above all, the bloodless genocide whereby one and a half billion men have been written off.

So comrades, let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions, and societies that draw their inspiration from it.

Humanity expects other things from us than this grotesque and generally obscene emulation.¹

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon makes a stirring argument that colonialism cannot end without a radical shift in mainstream discourse. He issues a call to accomplish this shift through pioneering ideological innovations. But the media environment available to Fanon at that moment was drastically different from the one today. In this essay, I would like to explore the question: what if Fanon had had Facebook at his disposal in the 1950s? By invoking “Facebook,” I am not limiting this question to that particular platform, but I want to gesture towards a larger conceptualization of knowledge distribution in digital ecologies. I ask: how would Fanon have reacted to the Internet and social media? How would he have tried to deconstruct and reconstruct it for his own radical use? Anticolonialist theorists like Fanon emphasized the disconnect between material realities and conventional ideologies – seen, for example, in his well-known argument that the inferiority complex of the colonized subject “is the outcome of a double process: – primarily, economic; subsequently, the internalization – or, better, the epidermalization of this inferiority”² – an argument as to how economic inequity becomes naturalized into issues of race. For Fanon, it is absolutely urgent for postcolonialist critics to point out and emphasize this dissonance. Social media outlets provide more avenues for individuals to influence popular opinion than previous ones. Do the abundance of

new outlets to distribute information in the digital space – what I term the “networked digital ecology”³ – provide a platform to create this room for relative ideological freedom?

This chapter considers this question through studying what I term the *gnosis* of the digital frontier. I borrow this term from V.Y. Mudimbe’s exploration of gnosis and the construction of Africa, signifying methods of inquiry and knowing that are shaped by the procedures of its use and transmission.⁴ I will elaborate on this term in the next section. While there have been many studies of radical media forms utilized by decolonial activists in the form of print media, radio, television and film,⁵ scholars have yet to make progress in connecting the political use of digital media with the history of radical media. In other words, they have frequently written off digital forms as lightweight “clicktivism” and “slactivism,” arguing that social media only engenders “weak ties” as opposed to the “strong ties” needed to form robust political community, and cautioning against the preponderance of corporate data-surveillance methods particularly in forms of social media activism.⁶ Yet, the potential of social media activism and the web more generally in providing new avenues for social organization since 2009 has been undeniable, ranging from groundbreaking events such as the Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall Street movement, hashtags on feminism on Twitter (#SolidarityisforWhiteWomen, #NotYourAsianSidekick) to online movements protesting the state treatment of the police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and the murder of Trayvon Martin in Florida. All of these events convene around community passions and angers around issues such as class exploitation, racism in white feminism, and the racism of law enforcement institutions, all of which are not generally given voice within the mainstream media.

In this essay, I argue that postcolonial scholars should intervene in this discussion and engage with social media especially because of the historical relevance of media to constructing political discourse in postcolonial thought. I unpack the ways in which digital knowledge is fundamentally different from print and consider several ways of developing a postcolonial “gnosis” given this difference. A foundational aspect of this shift lies in the changing notion of expertise and authority. Because digital publishing is generally so much cheaper and more freely available to content producers than print has ever been, information and its dissemination on the web are flourishing and multiplying in a way that exceeds everything available in print. Additionally, unlike print knowledge, digital knowledge is much less hierarchal, more continuously public, and less centrally administered or controlled. Access to digital knowledge also functions differently: valuable work is filtered to users via hyperlinks and algorithms rather than through traditional experts and authorities.

I contend that studying the gnosis of digital media offers the possibility to create a “rhizome” for knowledge distribution, a structure that conforms to many goals within anticolonial critique. Developed by Deleuze and Guattari, the “rhizome” offers a polyvalent structure that was invented to counter the binary oppositions in Enlightenment thought. Through an analysis of the gnosis of digital media, I suggest that decolonial revolutionaries like Fanon would have encouraged postcolonial activists to emphasize and utilize the rhizomatic structures of the digital world as a means of pushing the limits of colonial hierarchies and its orders of knowledge, while at the same time cautioning against the increasing reliance of algorithms to filter information.

PRINT VS. DIGITAL GNOSIS: PYRAMID, NETWORK, RHIZOME, AND OPENING UP EXPERTISE

In *The Invention of Africa*, V.Y. Mudimbe writes that

it is obvious that since its inception Africanism has been producing its own motives as well as its objects, and fundamentally commenting on its own being, while systematically promoting a *gnosis*. From this *gnosis* ultimately arose both African discourses on otherness and ideologies of alterity, of which *négritude*, black personality, and African philosophy might be considered the best established in the present-day intellectual history of Africa.⁷

Through this critique of knowledge formation by and about Africa and its peoples, he calls for a critical reflection on the role of Africanism – a discipline largely dominated by Europeans and Americans studying Africa and Africans – in creating the knowledge of Africa. For Mudimbe, *gnosis* is both a critical engagement with the colonial construction of this knowledge while simultaneously giving indigenous African philosophy equal weight. I find Mudimbe’s construction of *gnosis* particularly valuable in studying the landscape of social media because of his emphases on self-reflexivity and the ways in which structures create possibilities for knowledge. In this section, I outline some of the core differences between the structures of print and digital knowledge, to elaborate on what I consider digital *gnosis*.

Print and digital knowledges differ structurally. As the shape on the left in Figure 21.1 illustrates, print knowledge operates according to a pyramid structure. The expense of print production necessitates filters – filters that come in the form of the “expert” or specialized authorities who have been chosen for their ability to select work of merit because of their trusted mastery of certain areas, or their tastes and sensibilities. Print’s widespread reliance on expertise to assert its value has its origins in the mid-nineteenth century, with the burgeoning of scientific fields and industries, which emphasized positivism, data collection, measurability, and repeatability.

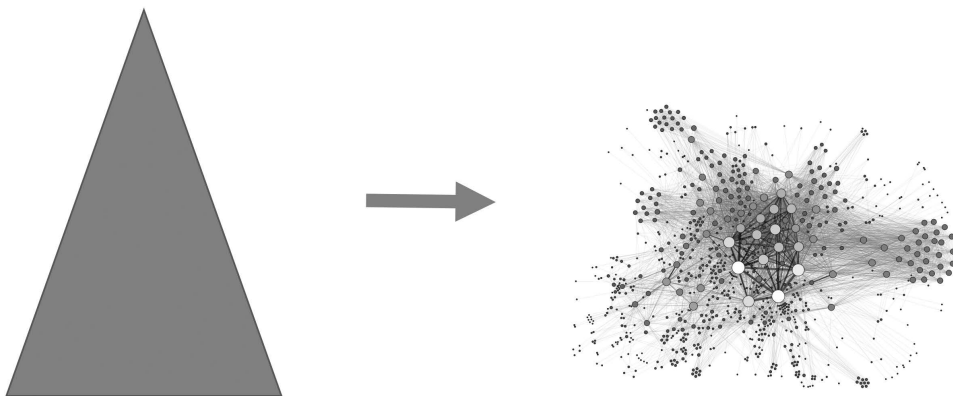


Figure 21.1 From print knowledge to digital knowledge.
Source and Permission: Author, Adeline Koh.

Donald Ableson⁸ locates the rise of reliance on the “professional expert” in the United States with a meeting held six months after the end of the Civil War, where scientific experts from a variety of fields were brought together to create the American Association for the Promotion of Social Science to inform public policy. The degree to which the “scientification” of such knowledges is politically charged with racial and colonial overtones can be found in the rise of “scientific racism” common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which employed scientific discourses such as anthropology, craniometry, and other disciplines to suggest the inferiority of some races and superiority of others.

The point is that print and digital knowledges are differently constituted. Only a little bit of all information produced eventually passes through the filters to be published – what gets published is symbolized by the narrow apex of the pyramid. This fraction has gone through extensive review and selection, after experts in the form of professors, acquisition editors, and review boards have combed through innumerable proposals and manuscripts to deem what is fit to print.

At the same time, digital publication has no real need for experts for vetting ideas prior to being made public. The rise of WYSIWYG editors and simple, free blogging platforms such as Blogger and WordPress makes disseminating information as easy as a click of a mouse button. Internet publication does not require the heavy investment of production supplies – typesetters, printers, paper, storage for books, etc. Mistakes are easily corrected on a website, quite unlike the mistakes in print, which once typeset are difficult and costly to amend. Current forms of social media – most notably the “microblogging” platform of Twitter – allow for new imaginings of idea dissemination and what constitutes a research text or literary work. Digital knowledge, in this regard, works more similarly to the shape on the right in Figure 21.1 – that of a network.

The structural shift from pyramid to network has many implications. First, a shift to a network suggests that digital knowledge is much less hierarchical and more decentered. In print, in order to make work public, one needs to get the approval of traditional gatekeepers such as acquisitions editors, editorial boards, scientific authorities, professors, academics, teachers, and magazine and book editors. The logic goes something like this: print is too expensive to allow for mediocre or poor work to be published and thus we need these gatekeepers. But because the costs of digital publishing are so low in comparison, this logic does not quite work. Anyone with a connection to the Internet with the desire to make their work and ideas public is capable of doing so. The democratic vision I am painting here, however, presumes universal and permanent access to the Internet, which continues to be uneven according to social-economic class and digital infrastructures in varied locations.

This ability to make one’s ideas public while bypassing such gatekeeping is both revolutionary and in line with the work of many postcolonial scholars, who have tried to problematize the concept of the neutral, depoliticized “authority.” As Edward Said’s foundational work with *Orientalism* has shown,⁹ the notion of “expertise” took shape within European thought to construct discourses of the Other that were used to justify colonial expansion. Much of postcolonial scholarship – as showcased by the work of Said, Mudimbe, Fabian¹⁰ and others – has been inspired by this effort to rewrite and restructure hierarchical knowledge. Mudimbe’s concept of *gnosis*,

pointedly, was especially built on this effort to go beyond the binary within European forms of reason, the product of which he called “the colonizing structure.”¹¹ In *The Invention of Africa*, he writes:

Because of the colonializing structure, a dichotomizing system has emerged, and with it a great number of current paradigmatic oppositions have developed: traditional versus modern; oral versus written and printed. . . . This presupposed jump from one extremity (underdevelopment) to the other (development) is in fact misleading. . . . Between the two extremes there is an intermediate, a diffused space in which social and economic events define the level of marginality.¹²

In contrast, Mudimbe asks to begin a type of discursive formation that “might be considered as a naming and an analysis of an alterity and refers to a new epistemological ordering: a theory of understanding and looking at signs in terms of ‘the arrangement of identities and differences into ordered tables.’”¹³

The ecology of digital knowledge through its decentering of hierarchy offers tremendous potential to subvert colonial structures of knowledge, which are often fully aligned with racialized systems of power. To illustrate: Wikipedia is a system open to anyone to edit (as long as they include cited references), providing a tremendous opportunity for postcolonial activists to counter the creation and dissemination of misinformation regarding the world both inside and outside of Asia and Africa. The Postcolonial Digital Humanities’ website’s Rewriting Wikipedia Project¹⁴ is one such example that makes use of the decentered hierarchies of knowledge offered by the web. The decentralization of power and access to publishing allow for more varied views on a subject to be made public, including those narratives that go against colonial stories. Indeed, websites and projects such as *Africa Is a Country*,¹⁵ *Making Britain: Discover How South Asians Shaped the Nation, 1870–1950*,¹⁶ the Rewriting Wikipedia Project,¹⁷ and *Digitizing Chinese Englishmen*¹⁸ are digital contributions to a larger endeavor to “decolonize the archive” by providing alternative ways of representing people of color and people of non-European descent around the world, and creating alternate maps of ethnic, racial, and cultural identities around the globe.

While some decry this openness and flexibility as a disadvantage – as any random person with a computer now has access to a soapbox and megaphone, meaning that there is a lot of mediocre work that circulates – digital publishing offers us the opportunity to interrogate the notion of the unassailable, powerful expert. For instance, David Weinberger notes:

As knowledge becomes networked, the smartest person isn’t the person standing at the front lecturing us, and isn’t the collective wisdom of those in the room. The smartest person in the room is the room itself: the network that joins the people and ideas in the room, and connects to those outside of it.¹⁹

In other words, it is not the “expert” at the front of the room or the people who make up the room that structures knowledge – it is the *infrastructure* that creates the forms of communication, which in turn gives this knowledge its content by giving it its shape.

The disruption of the image of the stable, neutral expert has extended to the fields of journalism and academia. Traditional journalists now report that their work is now instantly under scrutiny once published, with bloggers and social media accounts that quickly fact-check their stories once the post has been uploaded. At the same time, the authority of professional journalists to be the sole people to report news accurately is being challenged, as mainstream journalism increasingly finds itself taken in by knowledge scams and Internet hoaxes.²⁰ Journalistic authority and prestige for being the quickest source of news is also being challenged by citizen journalism, which often provides the most immediate access to stories before credentialed journalists can actually appear on the ground.²¹ Furthermore, the immense array of news covered by citizen journalists and social media users reveals the narrowness of the spectrum of news reported by traditional media outlets, as was evident with the dramatic underreporting of the anti-capitalist Occupy Wall Street Movement and racially charged incidents such as the killing of Trayvon Martin in Florida and of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. The slowness and reluctance of the traditional media to report on these issues in contrast to what has appeared in reports by citizen journalists on the Internet lays bare the more conservative and tightly controlled nature of mainstream journalist outlets.²²

Another important structural shift that reveals the rhizomatic potential of the digital is the degree to which the production of knowledge takes place in public rather than in individual, private silos. Digital production – in forms such as blogging, tweeting, other types of social media – encourage sharing ideas before they are fully formed, and hashing them out with an online community before committing to a finalized structure for these ideas, in effect making the private labor of reading and writing groups that have previously done this work quietly more public. This publicity extends to one of the most traditional realms of expertise: academic publication. Increasing numbers of academics are taking part in experiments between forms of publication, such as books that are written in public, commented on, and publicly peer reviewed before publication. Examples include Kathleen Fitzpatrick's *Planned Obsolescence*,²³ the *Shakespeare Quarterly* experiments,²⁴ and innovative experimental journals such as *Hybrid Pedagogy*²⁵ and *Ada*.²⁶ *A Journal of Gender, New Media and Technology*, both of which experiment with varied forms of public review and making work public before traditional external review has been completed. In this regard, the digital ecology allows us to see behind the closed curtain of academia – at each stage of the process. It reveals the complex process of creating this knowledge, rather than representing only the final version presented as an autonomous piece.

In this manner, the network structure potentially mirrors the form of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari propose the model of the rhizome as an alternative structure for the binary, dialectical thinking, which has been the foundation of Enlightenment thought. The rhizome model is an effort to think beyond the concept of a dichotomy, the thought of a strictly dichotomous, linear, ordered structure:

[A]ny point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or a root, which plots a point, fixes an order. The

linguistic tree on the Chomsky model still begins at a point S and proceeds by dichotomy. On the contrary, not every train in a rhizome is necessarily linked to a linguistic feature: semiotic chains of every nature are connected to very diverse modes of coding that bring into play not only different regimes of signs but also states of things of differing status.²⁷

The decentered structure of digital knowledge and the erosion of traditional authority recalls the antilinear structure of the rhizome that demands that we move beyond the pyramidal structures offered by print knowledge. It is interesting that while *A Thousand Plateaus* was first published in 1980, preceding the invention of the Internet, Deleuze and Guattari's central object of criticism was the print book, which for them represented the tyrannical structure of the Hegelian dialectic:

There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders, so that a book has no sequel nor the world as its object nor one or several authors as its subject. (23)

Here, they criticize the pyramid-like structure of print knowledge. Their conceptions of the “assemblage” and “connections between certain multiplicities” anticipates the hyperlinked nature of the digital world, where multiple types of knowledge can simultaneously exist and be interconnected.

The fluid structure of the rhizome is by nature well suited to postcolonial criticism: presenting a great opportunity for postcolonial critics to participate in new modes for identification and community. For example, social media is credited for both increasing public outrage against the Israeli government's 2014 attacks on Gaza and escalating the conflict between supporters of both sides.²⁸ Yet, social media can fruitfully be a space of educating the public of larger comparisons between colonial situations in different places, such as the comparison of Israeli rule to apartheid in South Africa, thereby creating new modes of imagining community through a postcolonial lens.

Digital ecologies thus provide opportunities for postcolonial activists aiming to reveal the ideological leanings and biases of ideas associated with processes of knowledge production. Through the ease of access to production, digital media make it possible to highlight and make legible the experiences and narratives of subaltern subjects. In this manner, the structure of the ecology of digital knowledge, which prioritizes the *crowd* rather than giving control over to a small group of experts, is rhizomatic: it bases its main creative spark and reason for being on the *people* who create it. It is also rhizomatic because there are so many points for exit, entry, and connection between these forms of knowledges. The “Wild West” nature of the Internet indicates the diverse potential of social thought, as well as the limitations associated with the idea of “facts” – for every website that uses “facts” to support its message, there exists a completely different website that marshals different facts for the opposing cause. Unlike the linear, totalizing order of print, the ecology of digital publishing is anarchic in a liberating sense: with social media, blogs, and wikis open to the public to edit.

DIGITAL FILTERS AND THEIR POLITICS: HYPERLINKS VS. ALGORITHMS

Through its rhizomatic structure, the web offers great potential for creating a post-colonial *gnosis* in which the concept of neutral expertise is laid bare by alternative forms of information being available and connected to more dominant knowledges. The process of knowledge-creation is made more public, and not presented in neat, coherent narratives.

I locate most of this potential in the ubiquitous presence of the *hyperlink* on the World Wide Web. The hyperlink is an interesting representation of this human-curated system of knowledge. Web pages are made up primarily of information and hyperlinks, which are links to additional information or like-minded sources for users to follow, such as the concept of a “blogroll” in a traditional blog, which showcases what other bloggers one blogger follows. The choice to create a hyperlink – or not – is in the hands of the person who creates the webpage. Creating a hyperlink also allows for the connection of disparate things which might not normally be linked together, thus engendering rhizomatic potential. The hyperlinked nature of the web is also present in the concept of open-source resources and software and open-source code repositories such as Github, which allows anyone to make use of source code and “fork” their own versions of programs. As such, the hyperlink is deeply connected with the web’s rhizomatic potential because it is human-curated, yet open: authors of webpages can choose what other pages they choose to link their works.

The importance of the hyperlink in directing user’s attention is starting to be replaced by the *algorithm*. Algorithms are mathematical formulas that are utilized in many big e-commerce websites to determine what people should see, read, watch, or buy. They include suggestions such as those from the Netflix algorithm, which suggests films and television shows to the user based upon their previous selections, to the Amazon recommendation engine, which suggests purchases based on previous ones.

Perhaps the most pernicious use of the algorithm is its use in social media sites such as Facebook, which calculate what and how many posts people view from their network in their feed, based upon the options that they have selected. Facebook’s algorithm, much like Netflix’s and Amazon’s, is secret and proprietary, meaning that they are not open to the public to inspect, and they are not open to be “forked” by developers to create their own iterations. This has tremendous political consequences because people are increasingly getting their news and information from their social networking feeds. Zeynep Tufekci, for example, recently argued that the Facebook algorithm was the reason why her Facebook feed was dominated by the more apolitical ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, while her Twitter feed, in which algorithms play a smaller role, was overrun with news about the riots and demonstrations in Ferguson, Missouri, over the killing of Michael Brown.²⁹

The power of algorithms lies in their increasing pervasiveness, by which they are starting to take the place of the old gatekeepers of experts and authorities. In this experiment, Tim Herrera demonstrates that Facebook’s algorithm prefers to show its users older, more popular content than new content that has not been engaged with. Given the growing popularity and presence of these social media platforms in our lives, the algorithms have become the new political space upon which the battle

for control over hearts and minds is being waged. While in the past we had “experts” and “authorities” to curate our information for us, increasingly, the content that we see is influenced by these mathematical formulas which claim to employ user data to generate results, but to which individual users cannot actively choose to influence and contribute. Where we once had a pyramid-like structure, linear information flow, and the gatekeeping expert, we now have an algorithm.

POSTCOLONIAL GNOSIS: RHIZOMATIZING THE ALGORITHM, NET NEUTRALITY, AND CORPORATE-OWNED DATA

To return to the opening question with which I started at the beginning of this essay – what if Fanon had had Facebook? For one, it is likely that he would be tremendously excited by a great deal of the political potential of the web, given the many ways it can be used to destabilize colonial objectivity and authority. In his attempt to find “new inventions,” Fanon’s work anticipates the rhizomatic structures later elucidated by Deleuze and Guattari. The open web – one in which access to publication is quick and easy, with minimal cost and setup – is one that offers postcolonial scholars and activists tremendous potential and possibility.

Still, Fanon would be concerned with the growing use of proprietary algorithms in determining the information that people see. In this regard, *making algorithms open* is imperative, and a necessary element of any postcolonial, political program engaged with digital media today. To open up these algorithms, make them accessible, and allow users’ input into them – this is the essential next step that we have to take. In this regard, opening up algorithms signifies that “Net Neutrality” – the principle that Internet service providers and governments should treat all data on the Internet equally, not discriminating according to user, content, site, or mode of communication – is one of the most important fights which postcolonial scholars need to take up. Net Neutrality has been an ongoing issue since 2003, since Tim Wu coined the term,³⁰ but one which has been of less interests to postcolonial scholars and activists.

At the same time, Fanon would have also been concerned with how social media platforms that are increasingly being used to form activist work are owned by corporations who employ data-gathering surveillance methodologies; thus allowing seemingly innocuous online activism to be harvested for marketable data³¹ – data that can potentially be used to put individuals in danger if the corporations who own this data choose to turn it over to governments. There are a slew of ways he could have approached this, including encouraging the creation of alternative social media platforms or the co-optation of current corporate ones, but this is an aspect of the web he would have paid attention to.

Postcolonialism has fundamentally been about complicating and understanding the relationship of domination and control between colonizer and colonized. Much of anticolonial and postcolonial criticism has been dedicated to unpacking and complicating the ways which dominant ideological discourses encourage forms of social alienation. We need to move to the social space in which we fight this battle from postcolonial studies’ traditional territory, the colonial library of print, to that of the networked public sphere. Postcolonial studies is greatly needed to understand subtle, unspoken domination or co-optation of digital knowledge hierarchies and networks.

The Internet is the new frontier of tremendous potential and power and control. If postcolonial scholars and activists want to continue fighting the problems of neo-colonialism, the Internet and its structures demands our urgent attention. If Fanon had had the digital media ecology available to him today, there would be a decent chance that he would urge us to pay attention and intervene in debates and activism about the Internet today, for it is here that our perceptions and ideologies are constantly transfigured and reconfigured. It is here as well that the struggle against imperialism and self-determination in the twenty-first century must take place.

ENDNOTES

1. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 238–239.
2. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1982), 13.
3. I use the term “ecology” to signify how different media outlets rely and feed on one another in the world connected by social media; mainstream news outlets, for example, often derive their most recent news from citizen journalists and bloggers.
4. V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).
5. There are so many studies on older forms of media used for radical purposes that I will not be able to list them all. I list three glaring examples: Third Cinema, an anticolonial form of cinema developed by Solanas and Getino; the role of the radio in anticolonial struggles; and music. For Third Cinema, see for example: Anthony Guneratne and Wimal Dissanayake, eds., *Rethinking Third Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1st ed., 2003); Jim Pines and Paul Willemen, *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1990); Mike Wayne, *Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema* (London: Pluto Press, 2001); Frieda Ekotto and Adeline Koh, eds., *Rethinking Third Cinema: The Role of Anti-colonial Media and Aesthetics in Postmodernity* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2009). For the radio, see: James R. Brennan, “Radio Cairo and the Decolonization of East Africa, 1953–64.” In *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, ed. Christopher J. Lee (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 173–95 and the second chapter which studies radio in Elizabeth C. Hanson, *The Information Revolution and World Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008). On music, Marissa Jean Moorman has published a study on connecting music to nationalism in Luanda, Angola: Marissa Jean Moorman, *Intonations: A Social History of Music and Nation in Luanda, Angola, from 1945 to Recent Times* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008).
6. For “clicktivism” see: José Luis Brea, “El Teatro de La Resistencia Electrónica.” *Aleph*, July 11, 1999. <http://aleph-arts.org/pens/teatro.html>. For “slactivism” see Evgeny Morozov, “The Brave New World of Slacktivism.” *Foreign Policy (Blog)*, May 19, 2009. http://neteffect.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/05/19/the_brave_new_world_of_slacktivism, and Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. Reprint edition. New York: PublicAffairs, 2012. For “weak ties” versus “strong ties,” see Malcolm Gladwell, “Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted.” *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010.
7. Mudimbe, *Invention of Africa*, xi.
8. Donald Abelson, *A Capitol Idea: Think Tanks and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2006), 50.
9. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1st Vintage Books ed., 1979).
10. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

11. See Mudimbe, *Invention of Africa*, 4
12. Ibid., 4
13. Ibid., 9
14. Adeline Koh and Roopika Risam, "The Rewriting Wikipedia Project." *Postcolonial Digital Humanities*, accessed September 22, 2014. <http://dhpoco.org/rewriting-wikipedia/>
15. "Africa Is a Country," accessed August 1, 2014. <http://africasacountry.com/>
16. "Making Britain: Discover How South Asians Shaped the Nation," accessed August 1, 2014. <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/>
17. "The Rewriting Wikipedia Project." *Postcolonial Digital Humanities*, accessed August 1, 2014. <http://dhpoco.org/rewriting-wikipedia/>
18. "Digitizing Chinese Englishmen," accessed August 1, 2014. <http://chineseenglishmen.adelinekoh.org>
19. David Weinberger, *Too Big To Know: Rethinking Knowledge Now That the Facts Aren't the Facts, Experts are Everywhere, and the Smartest Person in the Room Is the Room* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 141.
20. Luke O'Neil, "The Year We Broke the Internet: An Explanation. An Apology. A Plea." *Esquire*, December 23, 2013. <http://www.esquire.com/blogs/news/we-broke-the-internet>
21. See, for example: Axel Bruns, "The Active Audience: Transforming Journalism from Gate-keeping to Gatewatching." In *Making Online News: The Ethnography of New Media Production*, ed. Chris Paterson and David Domingo (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 171–184, and Rena Kim Bivens, "The Internet, Mobile Phones and Blogging." *Journalism Practice* 2.1 (February 1, 2008): 113–129. doi:10.1080/17512780701768568
22. See, for example, on Occupy Wall Street: Laya Liu Linjun Fan, "Analysis of U.S. Mainstream Media: A Case Study of News Reports on Occupy Wall Street Event." *Undergraduate Research Journal for the Human Sciences* 11.1 (September 11, 2012), <http://www.kon.org/urc/v11/fan.html>, and Brian Stelter, "Occupy Wall Street Puts the Coverage in the Spotlight." *The New York Times*, November 20, 2011, sec. Business Day / Media & Advertising, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/21/business/media/occupy-wall-street-puts-the-coverage-in-the-spotlight.html>
23. Fitzpatrick's book was published online before print publication and reviewed by two traditional external reviewers as well. The original digital experiment can be found here: <http://mcpress.media-commons.org/plannedobsolescence/four-preservation/>
24. The traditional *Shakespeare Quarterly* tried two experiments in open peer review, once in May 2010 with the "Shakespeare and New Media" special issue, http://mcpress.media-commons.org/ShakespeareQuarterly_NewMedia/, and another time in February 2011's special issue on "Shakespeare and Performance," <http://mcpress.media-commons.org/shakespearequarterlyperformance/>
25. See the *Hybrid Pedagogy* peer review process here: Sean Michael Morris, "Collaborative Peer Review: Gathering the Academy's Orphans." *Hybrid Pedagogy*, 2013, accessed September 22, 2014. <http://www.hybridpedagogy.com/journal/collaborative-peer-review-gathering-the-academy's-orphans/>
26. See the *Ada* journal peer review process here: "Review Process." *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media and Technology*. <http://adanewmedia.org/beta-reader-and-review-policy/>
27. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1st ed., 1987), 7.
28. Colin Daileida, "Israel Is Losing Control of the Gaza Media War." *Mashable*, July 22, 2014. <http://mashable.com/2014/07/22/israel-losing-media-war-gaza/>
29. Zeynep Tufekci, "What Happens to #Ferguson Affects Ferguson: Net Neutrality, Algorithmic Filtering and Ferguson." *Medium.com*. August 14, 2014, accessed September 22, 2014. <https://medium.com/message/ferguson-is-also-a-net-neutrality-issue-6d2f3db51ebo>. This is changing, as Twitter is starting to use algorithms to show users

- their feeds. See: Jeff Bercovi, "Algorithms Are Invading Your Twitter Stream, And Resistance Is Futile." *Forbes*, September 4, 2014, Digital edition. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffbercovici/2014/09/04/algorithms-are-invading-your-twitter-stream-and-resistance-is-futile/>, and Zeynep Tufekci, "Why Twitter Should Not Algorithmically Curate the Timeline." *Medium.com*, September 4, 2014. <https://medium.com/message/the-algorithm-giveth-but-it-also-taketh-b7efad92bc1f>
30. Tim Wu, "Net Neutrality, Broadband Discrimination." *Journal on Telecommunications and High Technology Law* 2.1 (Fall 2003): 141-176.
31. See José Luis Brea, "El Teatro de La Resistencia Electrónica." *Aleph*, July 11, 1999. <http://aleph-arts.org/pens/teatro.html>

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PART VII

ECOCRITICAL INQUIRIES IN
POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES



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CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

“ILL FARES THE LAND” Ecology, capitalism, and literature in (post-) Celtic Tiger Ireland¹

—♦—
Eóin Flannery

Locating the fields of postcolonial criticism and ecocriticism as adjacent in their respective materialist critiques of global capitalism and neo-imperialism, Graham Huggan suggests the following:

Both are invested, for example, in the situated critique of current globalizing practices that use capitalist ideologies of development to justify corporate expansionism and technological managerialism; and both are equally concerned with critically analysing the representational mechanisms that lend legitimacy to these practices, demonstrating the power of culture to (re)shape the word and, through it, the world.²

Huggan's comments are “global” in themselves, but they are no less useful for that; his convention of postcolonial and ecocritical methodologies, at a general, abstract level, can be productively applied to specific local instances of global capitalist incursion. In this case we will attend to the situation and experience of Ireland, a country with a protracted colonial heritage and a postcolonial history that belatedly became deeply entwined with the machinations, and ecological costs, of modernization and global capital. A combined postcolonial and ecocritical prism is a profitable way in which to read the Irish context. As Joe Cleary argues, while Ireland is geographically European, historically speaking, it has always been out of sync with the cycles of industrial modernization and capitalist expansion characteristic of many other European nations. For Cleary, “although Ireland belonged to the same geo-cultural locale, the same orbit of capital, as the major European imperial powers, it was integrated into that orbit of capital in a very different way to its main European neighbours.”³ In other words, despite its proximity to the central ruling geographies of global imperialism, Ireland was viewed and governed as a colony. Again in the current context, we need to think about how such a historical pedigree has informed social, economic, environmental, and cultural developments during, to use David Lloyd's term, Ireland's postcolonial “moment,”⁴ and, more precisely, during the period of economic and financial buoyancy: the “Celtic Tiger.”

“Even in an era when capitalists went out of their way to destroy capitalism,” Michael Lewis argues, “the Irish bankers had set some kind of record for destruction.”⁵ Such is Lewis’s conclusion, having traversed Europe in the wake of the serial, and interlocked, economic implosions since 2008.⁶ Lewis’s *Boomerang* has its origins in a series of extended articles published in *Vanity Fair*, a sequence covering the cases of Greece, Ireland, and Iceland.⁷ The Irish State’s catastrophic bank guarantee, and the country’s property and housing crashes, are two of Lewis’s primary foci, as he meditates upon, and interrogates, the causes and effects of Ireland’s financial and economic demise since 2008. Chiming with many of the critiques and appraisals of the end of the Celtic Tiger produced by scholars and commentators from within Ireland, Lewis underscores the “abnormality” of Ireland’s drive to become “normal.”⁸ He suggests: “Not knowing why they were so suddenly successful, the Irish can perhaps be forgiven for not knowing exactly how successful they were meant to be. They’d gone from being abnormally poor to being abnormally rich without pausing to experience normality.”⁹

The principles of social and economic convergence gestured to here by Lewis echo equivalent sentiments expressed by Fintan O’Toole in his *Ship of Fools*, an earlier polemic on the failures of Celtic Tiger Ireland. As part of an altogether more unforgiving assault on the institutional facilitators and beneficiaries of the country’s economic prosperity, O’Toole reflects upon the fact that “[f]or most of the twentieth century, Ireland had struggled to be like other countries. But between the late 1990s and 2008, other countries were told they must struggle to be like Ireland.”¹⁰ O’Toole’s latter point – that other countries were enjoined to pursue the pathways to economic buoyancy led by Ireland – takes the idea of Irish “exceptionalism” in a dramatic new direction. Rather than continuing as one of the peripheral and impoverished constituents of the European Union, a perennial draw on centrally generated capital funding, Ireland became a “model” for other aspiring smaller continental economies, such as Greece, on the basis of its apparent talent for attracting and securing inward multinational investment.¹¹

Returning to Lewis’s survey, we are in more sobering territory, as he invokes the shadowy, yet tangible authority of credit rating agencies in his reading of Ireland’s economic status and prospects. At the time of his research on the Irish economy, according to Lewis, “[p]rofessional credit analyst firms now judge Ireland the third most likely country in the world to default. Not quite as risky for the global investor as Venezuela, perhaps, but riskier than Iraq. Distinctly, *third world*, in any case [my emphasis].”¹² Clearly, Ireland has not defaulted and its ranking is not as depressed at the current juncture, but Lewis’s idiom is revealing. In this context of debt repayment, labeling Ireland “third world” might seem crude and anachronistic given the general standards of living experienced by many of the country’s citizens. Poised between the pejorative and the empirical, Lewis’s wielding of “third world” resurrects a term more familiar from ethical and economic debates associated with the period of decolonization during the post-Second World War geopolitical settlement. Yet, in other ways, such a nomination might speak sensibly to the nature and the extent of the country’s financial decline. Whether Lewis is conscious of it or not, employing such an adjectival description in relation to Ireland’s financial status recalls a conference and a publication from 1991 and 1992 respectively.

Edited by Therese Caherty, *Is Ireland a Third World Country?* showcased the proceedings of a conference held in April 1991 in Dublin. Surveying prevailing Irish

economic and social conditions, and factoring in its history of colonization, the participants actively considered the very real possibility that Ireland was utterly out of step with the social and economic norms of the so-called “first world.” Despite two decades of membership of the European Economic Community, as it was known at the time, Ireland’s social and economic realities were more closely allied to those of the developing world. The *Centre for Research and Documentation* provided much of the energy behind the event and the publication, and their analogies between Ireland and other “typical” non-European countries of the “third world” were contextualized and justified in the following ways by Caitriona Ruane:

CRD [Centre for Research and Documentation] was founded by Irish people who have either worked in Third World countries, or are interested and active in development issues. Many of those involved in CRD returned to Ireland and began to work in solidarity, community and human rights groups. We quickly realised that a lot of problems which Irish communities experienced, for instance, poverty, marginalisation, human rights abuses and inequality, were similar to those encountered in Third World countries, albeit on a different scale. There were also similarities in the processes through which Irish communities tried to remedy their problems. We felt it would be beneficial for groups in Ireland and the Third World to exchange experiences, information and ideas.¹³

With the benefit of hindsight, we can see just how acutely Ireland’s economic fortunes have spiked since this publication. But what is remarkable is that within half a generation Ireland can be thought of, in some measure of economic value, as a “third world” country once more. Granted, the earlier debate took the form of a lateral survey of Irish society, whereas the latter refers to the country’s level of indebtedness. Nevertheless, the recrudescence of the term “third world” in relation to Ireland signals the scale of the heights and the drop in the country’s economic performance. Likewise, it can be read as symptomatic of the extremity of behavior that is fundamental to Ireland’s progress from “bust” to “boom” to “bust” in such a brief period of time. What is equally true as well, as our discussion of creative writing during and after the Celtic Tiger has revealed, is that many Irish citizens never left the initial “bust” phase during the Celtic Tiger and, given the condition of the economy today, coupled with the burdensome legacies of the “boom,” such individuals are only likely to continue in situations of economic hardship. We might ask, then, should we give more credence to Lewis’s terminology about Ireland’s current and future prospects? Are the parallels drawn in the early 1990s by Caherty et al., modified by degrees of scale, useful to ongoing reflections upon the realities of “everyday economics” in Ireland? In any case, simply by invoking both allusions to “third world” Ireland alerts us to the levels of crisis and of dependence the Irish economy and the State finds itself in at the current juncture.¹⁴

Reading Donal Ryan’s literary responses to Ireland’s fateful embrace of unfettered and de-regulated capitalist “casino” economics in *The Spinning Heart* (2012) and *The Thing About December* (2013), the discussion will draw upon both postcolonial and ecocritical methodologies, but will place a premium on materialist strains within, and across, each of these interconnected theoretical and critical resources. The most effective postcolonial readings of Irish economic, political, and cultural histories have been

those that are mobilized postcolonial theorization as a critique of modernization, especially the works of Joe Cleary, David Lloyd, and Luke Gibbons.¹⁵ As Cleary argues:

From the perspective of postcolonial studies, modernisation discourse is simply a contemporary variant on the nineteenth-century bourgeois ideology of evolutionary progress, the occluded side of which has always been European imperialism and the colonial subordination of the greater part of the world to metropolitan domination.¹⁶

Arguing that Ireland's uneven historical incorporation into industrial modernity via a coerced experience of imperial modernization, these arguments attend to the material disparities that have accrued between indigenous Irish and colonial settlers, between native Irish economic and cultural practices and those that are grafted unevenly and violently onto Irish society. In other words, these critics anatomize the ways in which the internal dynamics of Irish economic practices – as cultural formations – which were influenced by and/or dictated to by – exogenous politico-economic agencies. And for the purpose of this essay, such analytical strategies seem apposite in the wake of the internal fallout from Ireland's often uncritical negotiations with global capital at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first, which, as Lewis suggests above, have returned the Irish State to a condition of financial dependence and have had grievous consequences for tracts of Ireland's environment.

The economic historian Jason W. Moore has provided a series of lengthy and insightful interventions on the interconnected histories of modern capitalism and lateral environmental degradation. In the process, he has forwarded a novel conceptual category, or “thinking tool,” in the form of “world-ecology.” Moore's project is historical at root, and rather than confine his focus to the standard time-frames of “high” capitalist activity – usually understood as beginning at the end of the eighteenth century – he argues for a much earlier point of origin:

Now what capitalism does when it begins to emerge, in a very powerful and real way after 1450, is to accelerate the pace of environmental degradation as a way to accumulate money capital. [. . .] So there was a radically accelerated pace of transformation that goes from the earliest moments in the rise of capitalism. What that meant is that there was a constant search for a new frontier, a new green field site.¹⁷

The final term (“green field site”) here is uncannily prescient in the context of a discussion of the topographical ruination of so many localities across Ireland in the service of property speculation during the Celtic Tiger. The (local) politics of zoning and rezoning “green field” lands in order to render them available for property development is one of the primary plot lines of Ryan's *The Thing About December*, and was a dominant “plot line” of Irish political life during the Celtic Tiger property frenzy. For Moore, capitalism is ecological, and we have been misguided in thinking that there are physical and conceptual boundaries between the “social” and the “natural.” In his view:

Capitalism as world-ecology, unifying the production of nature and the accumulation of capital, becomes a means of re-reading the diversity of human

experience in the modern world-system as unavoidably socio-ecological. [. . .] The upshot is that “nature” (however one defines it), like capitalism, is not an invariant structure. It is a *historical* structure.¹⁸

The logic pursuant to such a latter claim about the combined or interlinked historicity of capitalism and nature is that we need to attend to the modes in which this historically contingent and uneven relationship has been culturally narrated, for our purposes, within literary fiction. As Sharae Deckard suggests, deploying Moore’s work on world-ecology in a literary critical vein:

As the social form of capitalist modernity, literature necessarily registers the ecological regimes that constitute the world-ecology, revealing the structures of feeling, affects, bodily dispositions, and lived experiences that correspond to particular socio-ecological relations. As such, literary forms provide insight into the ideologies and geocultures which stabilize capitalist social relations over different cycles and temporalities.¹⁹

The literary works discussed here, though individually different in form and focus, can offer some insight into, and critique of, the “capitalist social relations,” to borrow Deckard’s terms, that contributed to the property “boom” cycle of Ireland’s Celtic Tiger.²⁰ Ryan’s narratives track both the temporal and spatial dynamics of Ireland’s recent foray into the networks of global credit and speculation. Operating in tandem, and in succession, *The Thing About December* and *The Spinning Heart* narrate the contentious genesis, as well as the violent, and tragic, dénouement of a single, yet representative, Irish locality’s experiences of the contingencies of global capital. Each of the primary literary texts describes experiences related to the personal, communal, and ecological impacts of the housing and property “booms,” and “crashes,” in Ireland. While it is a truism that there is always already a “delay” in narrating the history of the present moment, and of the contemporary, Ryan’s narratives are convincing efforts to realize such ambitions. At the same time, *The Thing About December* retains a “historical” quality, in that it relates the events that occasioned the property “boom” of the Celtic Tiger period.

Though published a year after *The Spinning Heart*, *The Thing About December* was, in fact, the first to be completed by Ryan, and its action precedes that played out in the later volume. The latter novel, in fact, recounts the prehistory of how the land on which the “ghost” housing estate now stands became available for development. Johnsey Cunliffe is the vulnerable protagonist of Ryan’s narrative, and the story charts a single calendar year of his life across twelve chapters. *The Thing About December* provides us with the background to the scenes of financial aftermath in *The Spinning Heart*; set almost a decade beforehand, Ryan dramatizes the conflictual and violent events in Johnsey’s life that led to his death and loss of his inherited land. While there are melodramatic notes to Ryan’s portrait of an embattled and intellectually feeble central character, he does convincingly convey the individual and collective avarice that may not have dominated, but certainly significantly punctuated, Irish society during the property boom. Johnsey’s relative intellectual simplicity is also suggestive, of course, of the simplistic financial calculus of those who prey on him; they unquestioningly equate land with property and profit, and instinctively jettison local historical

ties in lieu of insubstantial promissory notes. Johnsey is consistently a victim of local, random taunting and violence throughout his life, and, eventually, is orphaned as a young adult, inheriting land that has been designated for development. But Johnsey's instincts tell him that his affective relationships with the land and with those of his family, who inhabited and worked it, are stronger motive forces than the external pressures of grasping neighbors. Failing to yield to such pressures, Johnsey becomes a maligned local hate-figure; his intransigence is adjudged as being entirely out of kilter with the opportunities and the demands of the zeitgeist in Celtic Tiger Ireland:

Isn't it a fright to God to say a man could end up being a bar to progress and could deny jobs to half the village and wealth to all by just being alive. [. . .] Seemingly the whole village was all of a sudden looking out of their mouths at him to know what would he do about selling the land to this *consortium* of bigshots so that they may get on with their plan for houses, shops, a school, new roads and what have you. And none of it for profit – all them great men wants is to *give employment*, according to Herbert Grogan. The Creamers and the McDermotts and Paddy Rourke had apparently all already entered into *agreement-in-principle* with regard to their share of this famous land deal.²¹

Though often an uncomprehending and inarticulate protagonist, Johnsey is not entirely without insight; these are often personal and/or superficial insights. In this extended extract from the “July” chapter, we can glean a sense of the isolation foisted upon Johnsey by the rising tide of greed and speculation afoot in the locality. But Ryan also gives us an insight into: the relations that existed between private investment and the State; the linguistic and cultural mutations within Irish society at this time; and the co-existence of impoverished vulnerability and opportunistic materialism during the Celtic Tiger years. Relative poverty actually increased during the so-called “boom years,” and the promises of these investors, while not explaining in its entirety, do hint at the State's abdication of social responsibility, particularly with respect to marginal constituencies in Ireland. In short, the State should provide such facilities, and relinquished the opportunity to make the accruals of elevated taxation revenues operative and beneficial for large swathes of the Irish working class population. Johnsey, and several of the narrators in *The Spinning Heart*, are voices from marginal locations within Celtic Tiger Ireland; historically speaking, they are barely registered, hence their importance for Ryan. They chafe against the consented-to narratives of progress and affluence, and, again, in the extract above, Ryan expresses this relative alienation in formal terms. The first and the third italicized words belong to the new idioms of affluence, which predominated in popular and public discourse in Celtic Tiger Ireland. Ryan's emphasis here suggests the ways in which capitalism is itself cultural as well as ecological; in this context, the rhetoric of capitalism further alienates the protagonist, even though they refer to the development of his property. Pointedly, the use of the term “consortium” by Ryan, but also the corporate employment of the word, are contemporary debasements of the original Latin meaning, which referred to “fellowship, society and participation.” The language of capitalism, then, is purely contextual and historical sense or roots are traduced at the level of signification in the mid-west of Ireland.

Johnsey's alienation continues, and is intensified, at the level of discourse by the publication of damning newspaper articles detailing his apparent greed, and alleging

that he is holding the locality to ransom in his excessive demands for financial compensation on the sale of his land. Again, Ryan underscores the lack of agency of the individual in the face of local and, in this case, national scrutiny and misrepresentation. The invocation of the Irish media is deliberate by Ryan, as a large proportion of the news media were active cheerleaders for the unfettered expansion and speculation of the Irish property “boom.” Not content with conveying information and opinion, newspapers, in particular, fetishized the value and prestige of property, tantalizing readers with images of over-priced and unobtainable properties.²² Though clearly not to blame, the media’s cultivation and propagation of desire, through verbal and visual signification, are targeted here by Ryan. The intrusion of the metropolitan journalist and accompanying photographer are references to the multi-scalar nature of the narrative, and suggest the ways in which localities became aggregated and normalized into a “national” narrative of progress and affluence. Johnsey’s resistance to such uniformity, then, legitimizes his demonization at the local level, but also on a national platform by the journalist. Accompanying an unflattering photograph of Johnsey, the first newspaper article reads:

This is the young bachelor from rural Tipperary whose obscene demands are threatening to derail plans to transform the fortunes of an entire community [. . .] this young bachelor, who has turned a deaf ear to his neighbours’ appeals for sanity in his approach to brokering of a massive property deal, was left the land by his late parents and has shown little interest in working the land, choosing instead to lease the farm to neighbours and live a life of luxury.²³

The content of this newspaper extract is entirely at odds with the character encountered at length by the reader across Ryan’s narrative; Johnsey’s lifestyle could not be more removed from the excess depicted in the media report. In this isolated mediation of Johnsey’s attitude and behavioral patterns, Ryan draws on a familiar trope within modern Irish literary fiction: the vulnerable, abject loner. Johnsey is demonized as pursuing a lifestyle of unashamed individualism; basking in the inevitability of his own good fortune, insensible to the needs of those of his community. But, as the narrative reveals, the individualism attributed to Johnsey is, in fact, the conditioning feature of that community. Johnsey is portrayed as the “enemy within,” as being parasitic upon his fellow denizens, and the media report is an explicit ironization of both the role played by the media and of the governing mind-set of influential constituencies within Irish society during the Celtic Tiger “boom.” In effect, read in the context of the entire narrative, the newspaper article functions as a simulacrum, demonstrating the emptiness of mainstream signification and discourse as they fomented crisis-inducing desire for property and profit.

Ryan’s *The Spinning Heart* is a novel as, to use Deckard’s term, story-cycle; while there is a primary protagonist in the character of Bobby Mahon, Ryan’s narrative is delivered from the perspectives of twenty other characters. It is assuredly not a story-cycle in the tradition of the short story, of a text like Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*; rather it details the events of a single summer in 2010, and these events are, at one level, solidly rooted in a single location: a small regional town within commuting distance of the larger city of Limerick. Thus, while Ryan’s novel clamors with diversity in terms of its formal presentation, there is a solidity and fixity to its siting

and to its time-frame. The primary drama of the text's 2010 events revolves around the collapse in the fortunes of a local, and corrupted, property developer and builder, and the variegated yet interlinked consequences for the locality's population. Therefore, one of the motifs of contemporary Irish history drawn on by Ryan is that of the "ghost estate," that is, housing estates consisting of unfinished, semi-constructed homes. The majority of the "ghost estates" that remain are in rural Ireland, concreted hauntings of futures that will never materialize, and they are artifacts that testify to the cultural and economic investments made in advanced capitalism during the Celtic Tiger. In a recent astute appraisal of how Irish photographic art has re-presented such scenes of abandonment, Justin Carville writes:

In a land littered with historical ruins, [Anthony] Haughey's and [David] Farrell's topographies of terror confront the viewer with Ireland's newest of ruins drawn down to earth, not through nature's power but through the speculative forces of capital. Many of these topographies have been formed through a series of leaps of faith into a future that seemed certain.²⁴

And it is just such a "topography of terror" that confronts the denizens of the small town in the mid-west of Ireland in 2010; what manifests is an uneven engagement between the global machinations of capitalism and the misguided faiths of local actors in regional Ireland. Ryan's narrative, and the recent history of the Celtic Tiger, does not disguise the facts that many were willing investors in and victims of such ethereal financial faith. But in Ryan's narrative we get a sense of the exhausting and divisive aftermaths of the collapse of capitalism's exercises in one specific locality.²⁵

Deckard foregrounds the values of global experimentalism of narratives that trade in multi-scalar spatial and temporal settings, whose formal features enable a critique of capital's linear mode of narration. For Deckard:

Whether as world-systems novels, novels-in-fragments, story-cycles, or composite novels, a variety of literary forms in contemporary world-ecological literature have emerged which attempt to move beyond realist metonymy and model systemic-relations in their very structure.²⁶

Ryan's *The Spinning Heart* cannot be labeled as hugely experimental, in the sense outlined by Deckard, but there are limits to its attention to locality and place, and together with its patterning as a "story-cycle," the imprints of the national and the global are evident across the text, and it is these features that align Ryan's work with Deckard's argument. As is abundantly clear from Ryan's texts, the immediate action may appear to concern itself with the micro-politics of local opportunism, but there is no failsafe prophylactic against the influences of globalization. And, in both thematic and formal terms, *The Spinning Heart* acknowledges and indicts the imprints of the global on seemingly remote localities, yet in both of his texts, he also allows the registration of resistance to such globalizing agencies.²⁷

Ireland's historical implication in the global took the shape of its status as a colony of the British Empire; its exemplarity as a Catholic nation and society; and fluctuating patterns of enforced and voluntary emigration and migration across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Much of the country's previous experiences of

the global have been in the context of its uneven and coerced incorporation into British imperial modernity. As O’Toole maintains, the Irish voluntarily adopted the lifestyles and value-systems of capitalist globalization, adopting consumerist values with alarming alacrity; importing and adapting neoliberal economic and social policies with little concern for resulting social inequalities; and playing host to a large and international community of immigrant workers from Europe, Asia, and Africa.²⁸ And it is self-evident from both of Ryan’s texts that there are exacting human and communal costs to such willing self-abasement; with cruel historical irony, latter-day efforts to retain agency in the global context – previously unavailable under British imperial modernity – have now returned the Irish State, and its citizen taxpayers, to the roles of quasi-vassals of international political and economic institutions.

The Spinning Heart opens with Bobby Mahon’s first-person narrative, two months after he has been made redundant, and now reduced to financial penury with a young family for whom he needs to provide. He recalls at suggestive length the revelation that the financial management of the building firm was corrupted, before giving a mordant account of the heyday of his professional life as the property bubble expanded relentlessly:

And now I can’t pay for the messages. Christ on a bike. I had a right swagger there for a couple of years, thinking I was a great fella. *Foreman*, I was clearing a grand a week. Set for life. Houses would never stop going up. I’d see babies like our own being pushed around the village below and think: lovely, work for the future, they’ll all need their own houses some day too. [. . .] Once they buried that boy of the Cunliffes years ago and his auld auntie grabbed that land and divided it out among the bigshots, we all thought we were feckin elected.²⁹

Bobby Mahon furnishes a micro-history of the past, present, and the aborted future of this locality, but also, *in parvo*, that of many communities across Ireland during the same period. The “Cunliffe” boy mentioned here is the protagonist of *The Thing About December*, and, as such, there is a gothic element to this local drama, with the sins of the past returning to haunt those who benefited from the original violent death. And while Bobby’s account here emphasizes the embedded futurity that sustained so many myths of prosperity during the Celtic Tiger property “boom,” history and the past are just as crucial to any understanding of these texts and of the Celtic Tiger itself. Thus, the relations between past and present and between locality and globality are profoundly important to our readings of these literary texts. In terms of historicizing the property “boom,” the period that allowed Bobby Mahon to earn such a lavish wage, and that nurtured his dreams of perpetual progress, history is germane both as presence and absence at the same time.

There are conflicting theories about what precisely drove so many Irish people to accumulate staggering levels of personal debt in order to secure homeownership – often multiple properties. But one of the most convincing proposals links such acquisitiveness to Ireland’s history of colonialism:

The sheer frenzy around homeownership was clearly a latent outcome of a post-colonial anxiety around land, exacerbated by government housing policies that

supported developers and speculators over households [. . .] itself indicative of the administrative deficit stemming from postcoloniality. Rather than being a mere footnote illustrating the more recent (and thus important) histories explaining the property boom, the postcolonial context was in fact integral to how it was produced and sustained over time.³⁰

Of course, the histories of capitalism and colonialism, especially British variants, are heavily interconnected, so that Ireland's historical experiences of colonialism were simultaneously a series of harsh, uneven, and exploitative exposures to capitalist modernity. A toxic compound of local forms of political clientelism, instrumental in zoning land for often unnecessary property development, and the adoption of neoliberal political and economic *credo*, then, overexposed the Irish economy to the cyclicity of the capitalist market. These were key contributory factors in the view of Sean O'Riain, with the consequence that: "The property and banking 'growth machine' drove many of the key economic decisions of the decade while corporatism was hollowed out in part to become a more narrow form of political exchange in an increasingly *speculative* economy [my emphasis]."³¹ Thus, the greed for land, facilitated and encouraged by national and local government, during the Celtic Tiger can be read, at one level, as a contemporary instance of one country's interface with global capital and new networks of financial neo-imperialism, but it is also the latest in a cycle that has its predecessor in the history of British imperial capital's expropriation of the country's resources prior to independence in 1922. And it is precisely in being attuned to this cyclicity that we can divine history as presence and absence in Ryan's work, and in the broader history of the Celtic Tiger property boom. History, as we have just seen, manifests as presence in the production of desire for property, for "landed" security into the future. Yet, such presence is haunted, and ultimately undone, by history as absence; namely, the failure to read the history of capital as one of cycles of "booms" and "busts," of productive, expropriative visitations and remorseless exits from peripheral economies and societies.

There may be twenty-one narrators in Ryan's novel, but implicit in the text is the fact that this is no isolated instance of post-boom economic and social dislocation. Ryan exposes the greed that conditioned the decisions and policies of property developers in a market that was overheated and under-regulated; his narrative captures the compulsion induced in people, even the fear of being deprived of some tangible material security, as the performance and appearance of value supersedes the quality and material substance of the commodity exchanged. The materiality of land and place, the hard-earned territories of Irish culture, and the contested topographies of Irish colonial history are, then, transvalued into sites of transient and self-destructive capitalist exchange. And again, later in the same chapter cited above, Josie Burke's reflections chime with those of Bobby Mahon; the roots of this crisis indeed are inauspicious, and history haunts these sites of suburban ruination:

We should have known it would all end in tears. Around here, it all started with tears: that boy of the Cunliffes getting shot in his own yard by the guards, and his land going to his auntie, who shared it out among us like the Roman soldiers with Our Lord's purple robe. That was no way for good times to start.³²

Josie Burke repeats, but elaborates on, the background to this locality’s immersion into the property boom detailed by Bobby Mahon, a fact that consolidates the aforementioned level of coherence and continuity across the text despite the numerous narrative perspectives. Such a technique re-enforces the “locality” of the action and of the prehistory, but does not preclude us from reading beyond the local in relation to the incursions of global capital, and, in particular, finance and credit, across a host of similar “localities” in Ireland.

The formal architecture of both of Ryan’s novels focus our attention on “place,” on interpersonal dynamics within a confined geography.³³ In *The Spinning Heart*, the employment of twenty-one different narrators offers a wide plurality of voices and perspectives, but there is a loose coherence retained due to the limited spatial context of the narrative. The multiplicity of voices within a single community is also suggestive of the tentacular reach of global capital into diverse and peripheral physical and cultural ecologies. One of the voices encountered is that of a migrant laborer, Vasya, whose heritage is that of a Khakassian reindeer herder. Tellingly, Vasya’s narrative partly worries over the primacy of place and home, a function of his own displacement, no doubt. Yet, as he reflects upon the local topography to which he has become accustomed through a pattern of regular walking, his thoughts work counter to the labor of property development in which he was previously employed: “Houses are hidden at the end of long avenues. [. . .] These people are fixed, rooted, bound to a certain place. I think of my father’s camp and the moving of the herds across thousands of miles of openness.”³⁴ There is an element of wish fulfillment or fantasy about Vasya’s imaginative projections here, but, more importantly, he alludes to the vagrancy of his family and of his tribe. While there is a dignity to the historical itinerancy of his heritage, Vasya’s “mobility” is within the networks of global capital. His presence in this rural Irish town is a testament to the reach and the contingency of these global agencies, and it is further evidence of the attention given by Ryan – across both of the texts – to the multi-scalar fabric of the community’s interface with global capital.

Indeed, a later narrative, relayed by Kate, a nursery school owner in Limerick city, opens with a reference to the vagaries of depending upon the fluctuating fortunes and priorities of multinational capital: “One awful thing that happened since the recession started is Dell closing. Like, it nearly finished us all. They were bloody *all* Dell.”³⁵ Across 2009 and 2010, the computer manufacturer shed 1,900 employees in Limerick, relocating operations to Poland; Ireland’s open door policy to Foreign Direct Investment, which includes its contentiously low rate of Corporation Tax, has, historically, allowed it to compete on the global market, but also brings high risk stakes, as such manufacturing closures, and the parallel global banking crisis demonstrate. Ryan’s narratives display how these macro-crises are entwined with government policy and media discourse at national levels, as well as conditioning trends in communal and individual behavior at local levels. As we noted above, reading the patterns of consumption and property speculation during the Celtic Tiger in terms of Ireland’s colonial history is instructive. Likewise, such a reading strategy can offer potential insights into state management of land politics and property ownership; and individual and communal attitudes to land and tenurial security beyond Ireland and across other postcolonial societies who cannot but be affected by the mobile and mutating cycles of capitalist neo-imperialism.

Ryan's narrative offers hints at the multi-scalar sources and implications of this localized manifestation of Ireland's property frenzy, and does so effectively in another instance from the viewpoint of a single mother, Realtin, one of the few residents of an uncompleted and sparsely populated "ghost estate":

There are forty-four houses in this estate. I live in number twenty-three. There's an old lady living in number forty. There's no one living in any of the other houses, just the ghosts of people who never existed. I'm stranded, she's abandoned.³⁶

There is an unreal quality to life on the "ghost estate"; a feeling of aftermath at the same time as a sense of lives never quite lived or commenced. Here the failed past and the unrealizable future commingle amid the emptiness and dereliction. But the origins of the agencies that manufactured these local spaces of private grief at past mistakes and at bleak future prospects are always present as hauntings, though not as physical forces with which one can reckon. And we divine such absent presences in the retrospective portions of Realtin's narrative. In the same opening section of her narrative, Realtin explains how she came about living in such circumstances, how fear of being left remote from the "inevitable" durability of propertied prosperity was a primary motive force in her decision making. Recalling her conversation with the estate agent:

He said he couldn't promise us any of the houses would be available the next day. [. . .] Daddy got all worried and flustered then, and drove like a madman back to the Credit Union to get me the cash.³⁷

But this is not only the instance of a fear-induced purchase; working in a legal office, Realtin is witness to further demonstrations of this culture in which credit and profit have commandeered common sense, and the ownership of property is an end in itself, with little thought given to price or value. In short, absolute trust is placed in absent forces that guarantee the future value of a product one has been all but coerced into acquiring. As Realtin reflects later, and this is commonly the case across similar estates and in major Irish cities, homes have become punishing financial burdens as their value has fallen away. "Across Ireland," Lewis writes:

People are unable to extract themselves from their houses or their bank loans. Irish people will tell you that, because of their sad history of dispossession, owning a home is not just a way of avoiding paying rent but a mark of freedom. In their rush to freedom, the Irish built their own prisons.³⁸

There is a conspiratorial air to the exploitation and silence confronting the consumer; financial numbers are seen as arbitrary, yet all too powerful at the same time. And, crucially, as in the extract detailing of Realtin's own experience, it is credit, and the ease with which credit for mortgages can be sourced, that is the unifying feature of these local lives. The properties, the builders, the estate agents, the legal firms, and the mortgages provided may well be familiar and indigenous, but the lifeblood, the nourishing agent, of the entire system is the credit underwritten by the Irish banking system and its own indebtedness to international financial markets. Thus, these

isolated and pressurized individual consumers, lenders, and producers act at local levels.

Commentators of all political and economic persuasions and affiliations have framed their diagnoses and prognoses for the current global capitalist conjuncture in several different ways. For some, nationally located mis-steps precipitated the worst legacies of economic ruination, while others apportion blame to the corrupted, and corruptible, machinations of the global market itself. And such polarities have been in evidence in debates pursuant to the demise of Ireland’s Celtic Tiger.³⁹ Yet such simple dichotomies are not sustainable within a nuanced explication of how the uneven exchanges between international global capital and finance, and the particularities of the Irish economic and political systems, eventuated in the seemingly unbounded economic growth during the country’s economic “boom.” In the current context, too, we are presented with such nuance across Ryan’s linked fictional narratives. Ryan presents the intense and claustrophobic fallout from the collapse of the Irish banking system through narratives that teem with local voices, but, as Deckard argues, such story-cycles are never unmindful of the broader global context and forces that condition the smaller scale economic ecologies. *The Spinning Heart* and *The Thing About December* represent what Edna O’Brien terms “a debt-saddened landscape,”⁴⁰ a physical and cultural terrain that is specific and historical, but whose current condition cannot be unwedded from the past and present histories of global imperial and neoliberal capitalism. In their aggregated and interconnected narrations of Ireland’s postcolonial embrace of neoliberal modernization and capitalist ideologies, both texts speak beyond the boundaries of Ireland’s geographies to other postcolonial landscapes that are more than simply, or are more acutely, “debt-saddened.” Ryan’s texts, then, must be read as “imaginative” critiques of the globally connected yet resolutely local consequences of this strand of the Celtic Tiger period. In their respective representations of the troubling prehistory of, and subsequent fallout from, Ireland’s property “boom,” both texts track the transvaluation of the Irish nonhuman environment, as well as many of its cultural and ethical reference points. Such concentrations, then, are unquestionably exemplary for other equivalent postcolonial societies and cultures whose human and nonhuman ecologies are laid sieged under the varied and uneven manifestations of global capitalism.

ENDNOTES

1. The original source for the essay’s title is Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village* (1770), “*Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey, / Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.*” But the more recent reference is to Tony Judt’s *Ill Fares the Land* (New York: Penguin, 2010), which is a powerful polemical essay on the failures of modern political and economic thought and structures.
2. Graham Huggan, “Postcolonial Ecocriticism and the Limits of Green Romanticism.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 40.1 (March 2009): 6, 3–14.
3. Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Field Day Books, 2006), 18.
4. See David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993).
5. Michael Lewis, *Boomerang: Adventures of a Financial Meltdown Tourist* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), 84.

6. Lewis's article includes significant input from the Irish economist, Morgan Kelly, who was a dissenting voice against prevailing economic practices during the Celtic Tiger: <http://www.ucd.ie/economics/staff/profmorgankelly/>
7. These case studies in *Vanity Fair* cover Iceland, Greece, and Ireland: "Euro Disasterland Part 1: Iceland," April 2009; "Euro Disasterland Part 2: Greece," November 2010; and "When Irish Eyes Are Crying," March 2011.
8. Representative of such publications are: Fintan O'Toole, *Ship of Fools: How Stupidity and Corruption Sank the Celtic Tiger* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009); *Up the Republic!: Towards a New Ireland* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012); Peadar Kirby, *Celtic Tiger in Collapse: Explaining the Weaknesses of the Irish Model* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010); Debbie Ging, Michael Cronin, and Peadar Kirby, eds., *Transforming Ireland: Challenges, Critiques and Resources* (Manchester: Manchester University Press); Caroline Crowley and Denis Linehan, eds., *Spacing Ireland: Place, Culture and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Eugene O'Brien and Eamon Maher, eds., *From Prosperity to Austerity: A Socio-Cultural Critique of the Celtic Tiger and Its Aftermath* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).
9. Lewis, *Boomerang*, 88–89.
10. O'Toole, *Ship of Fools*, 9–10.
11. As Peadar Kirby, a trenchant critic of Ireland's neoliberal model concedes in an otherwise caustic account of the inequalities that score Irish society during the Celtic Tiger: "Ireland's economic boom of the 1990s catapulted it from being a relative laggard in development terms to become the 'Celtic Tiger,' achieving high growth rates, full employment and rising living standards in contrast to the sluggish growth managed by most of its European neighbours during the same period," "Globalization, the Celtic Tiger and Social Outcomes: Is Ireland a Model or a Mirage?" *Globalization* 1.2 (2004): 205–206.
12. Lewis, *Boomerang*, 85.
13. Caitriona Ruane, "Preface." In *Is Ireland a Third World Country?*, ed. Therese Caherty (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1992), ix. The social issues mentioned by Ruane above are undeniably relevant to critical discussions today in Ireland, but they are not simply accruals of the post-Celtic Tiger "bust"; they were persistent across the "boom," but have been cruelly exacerbated since the end of its tenure in Ireland.
14. Colin Coulter suggests that the Celtic Tiger "narrative" was "managed" in such a way that the real economic inequalities of Irish society were not a permissible part of the celebratory version of the story: "The notion that the economic boom has conferred benefit upon all Irish people represents, perhaps, the most pernicious of the myths that have bloomed during the Celtic Tiger era. The Republic of Ireland exhibits, of course, all those class distinctions and inequalities that are the hallmark of a capitalist society," "The End of Irish History? An Introduction to the Book." In *The End of Irish History: Critical Reflections on the Celtic Tiger*, ed. Colin Coulter and Steve Coleman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 21.
15. An indicative sample of such work would include: Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Field Day Books, 2005); David Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800–2000: The Transformation of Oral Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996).
16. Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune*, 14.
17. Jason W. Moore, "The Socio-Ecological Crises of Capitalism." In *Capital and Its Discontents: Conversations with Radical Thinkers in a Time of Tumult*, ed. Sasha Lilley (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011), 139.
18. Jason W. Moore, "Ecology, Capital and the Nature of Our Times: Accumulation and Crisis in the Capitalist World-Ecology." *The Journal of World-Systems Research*, 17.1 (2011): 135.

19. Sharae Deckard, “Mapping the World Ecology: Conjectures on World-Ecological Literature.” Unpublished paper, School of English, Drama and Film, University College Dublin. https://www.academia.edu/2083255/Mapping_the_World-Ecology_Conjectures_on_World-Ecological_Literature.
20. Neil Murphy argues that many of the works of major contemporary Irish novelists “repeatedly revolve around the problems of historical reconstruction, the vagrancy of memory, the indistinct nature of human perception and the inevitable transformative effect of linguistic expression,” “Contemporary Irish Fiction and the Indirect Gaze.” In *From Prosperity to Austerity: A Socio-Cultural Critique of the Celtic Tiger and Its Aftermath*, ed. Eugene O’Brien and Eamon Maher (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 178.
21. Donal Ryan, *The Thing About December* (Dublin: Doubleday Ireland/Lilliput Press, 2013), 126.
22. In her Celtic Tiger novel, *The Devil I Know* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), Claire Kilroy touches on similar phenomena; her narrator describes his business partner’s cultivation of just such publicity about property. The relationship between property sale and voyeuristic media also crops up in Justin Quinn’s novel, *Mount Merrion* (Dublin: Penguin Ireland, 2013).
23. Ryan, *The Thing About December*, 137–138.
24. Justin Carville, “Topographies of Terror: Photography and the Post-Celtic Tiger Landscape.” In *From Prosperity to Austerity: A Socio-Cultural Critique of the Celtic Tiger and Its Aftermath*, ed. Eamon Maher and Eugene O’Brien (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 116.
25. In a related vein see Luke Gibbons “‘The Wild West of European Finance’: Anachronism, Modernity and the Irish Crisis.” *Field Day Review* 7 (2011): 122–137.
26. Deckard, “Mapping the World Ecology.” https://www.academia.edu/2083255/Mapping_the_World-Ecology_Conjectures_on_World-Ecological_Literature.
27. Reflecting on the historical and contemporary nature, and variety, of Ireland’s immersion in the flows of global economics and cultural exchange, Fintan O’Toole writes: “Over this period [the Celtic Tiger], after all, Ireland did not merely become more globalised. It became, according to the A.T. Kearney/*Foreign Policy* magazine Globalisation Index, the most globalised society in the world in 2002, 2003 and 2004. [. . .] There is a qualitative difference between being affected by globalisation, as Ireland was for previous centuries, and being its poster child, as it became in the recent boom years,” “Foreword,” In *Cultural Perspectives on Globalisation and Ireland*, ed. Eamon Maher (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), x–xi.
28. See O’Toole, “Foreword,” x–xi.
29. Donal Ryan, *The Spinning Heart* (Dublin: Doubleday Ireland/Lilliput Press, 2012), 13.
30. Rob Kitchin, Cian O’Callaghan, Mark Boyle, and Justin Gleeson, “Placing Neoliberalism: The Rise and Fall of Ireland’s Celtic Tiger.” *Environment and Planning A* 44 (2012): 1317.
31. Sean O’Riain, *The Rise and Fall of Ireland’s Celtic Tiger: Liberalism, Boom and Bust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 233.
32. Ryan, *The Spinning Heart*, 26.
33. See Eileen Battersby’s review of *The Spinning Heart*: “District with the Downturn Blues,” *The Irish Times*, November 10, 2012.
34. Ryan, *The Spinning Heart*, 39.
35. *Ibid.*, 97.
36. *Ibid.*, 42.
37. *Ibid.*, 42.
38. Lewis, *Boomerang*, 103.
39. Terrence McDonough points out: “A rancorous debate has opened up over who or what was responsible for the debacle, with the government emphasising the international

aspects of the crisis, while opposition parties sought to lay the blame at the feet of a domestic cabal of developers, bankers, and governing party politicians,” “The Irish Crash in Global Context.” *World Review of Political Economy* 1.3 (2010): 442.

40. Edna O’Brien, *Country Girl: A Memoir* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 321.

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CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

TOXIC BODIES AND
ALIEN AGENCIES

Ecocritical perspectives
on ecological others



Serpil Oppermann

Similar to postcolonial studies, ecocriticism is a heterogeneous field of study that does not correspond to any unified discourse. Although internally varied, ecocritical discourses converge on non-anthropocentric knowledge practices, which entail a consensual focus to address and conceptualize the global environmental crisis in socio-cultural and literary contexts. In the current critical moment, the argument goes, “we cannot encounter the natural untouched or uncontaminated by human remains.”¹ Ecocriticism focuses on this condition of interfaced reality that points to the ways in which culture and nature are closely entwined. Postcolonialism, however, prioritizes an ostensibly anthropocentric vision, exploring cultural models and methods that account for the relations of power in the “discursive division between the First and the Third World, the North and the South,”² as well as in the construction of forms of alterity. Although the concept of alterity has been theorized from exhaustive perspectives, postcolonial theory has shown little or no interest in the nonhuman other, whereas in ecocriticism “[a]lterity is always also defined by the nonhuman other.”³ Given this fundamental difference, one might expect these two fields hardly to intersect, but negotiating this difference in a slowly developing dialogue, they have actually converged with the arrival of postcolonial ecocriticism.⁴

Embodying ecocriticism’s basic ecological commitments, postcolonial ecocriticism has expanded the postcolonial foci towards more nuanced explorations of ecological conditions, ecological others, and environmental injustices in postcolonial cultures.⁵ In this light, it signals the commingling of postcolonial and ecocritical issues as a means of contesting ecological imperialism, biocolonization, environmental and social injustice, and environmental racism, speciesism, and anthropocentrism – matters of concern that are always intrinsically interwoven. This postcolonial ecocritical framework is important in understanding ecological otherness which, inspired by Sarah Jaquette Ray’s conceptualization of “the ecological other,” I analyze in the form of toxic bodies in this chapter. My argument, however, does not build upon Ray’s analysis of the socially excluded disabled body as the ecological other. Instead I foreground the material “traffic” between the body and the environment from the material ecocritical perspective in my discussion of toxic bodies. Therefore, equally important here is the material ecocritical framework that sheds light on the

intersection of bodies and environments generating this othering process. What perpetuates this form of othering are the dangerous material agencies (such as toxins, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals) that infiltrate bodies and make them permeable and vulnerable. This focus allows me to suggest that ecological otherness is better understood within the wider framework of material ecocriticism as it provides a theoretically compelling account of these major actors' material effectivity. I frame my view by reading the body as a *material text* in which cultural practices, social and political decisions, and environmental processes are intertwined with issues of justice, health, and ecology. I also pay particular attention to the work of postcolonial ecocritics since these issues are confronted by postcolonial ecocriticism in a way underscored by its emphasis on the social injustices occasioned by environmental deterioration. My aim is, thus, twofold: first, to discuss how ecological otherness results from the forces of global capitalism that create trajectories of environmental pollution extending into every metabolic system; and second, to examine how the toxic body becomes a site where social and ecological dynamics intersect compounding postcolonial issues with material ecocritical concerns. In other words, combining the insights of material and postcolonial ecocriticism is necessary in examining the body as a specific instance of the coextensivity of material agencies, discriminatory social practices, and ecological decline. I conclude with brief analyses of two novels, Latife Tekin's *Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills* and Richard Powers's *Gain*. These texts effectively illustrate how toxic bodies become ecological others when they are exposed to hazardous chemicals and other powerful alien agencies that act upon bodies in unpredictable ways.

* * *

Considering the deteriorating ecological conditions with social, political, and economic consequences, and calling for climate justice, Greta Gaard perceptively argues that the impact of the anthropogenic ecological crisis is felt "hardest by those least able to make adaptations for survival," such as "people living in poverty" and "disaster-prone areas."⁶ Although environmental problems, as Simon Estok avers, "affect all people and defy boundaries of nation, creed, race, ideology, gender, sexuality, class,"⁷ the human dimension of environmental disasters in the Global South is more traumatizing, like the typhoon Haiyan that hit the Philippines in November 2013, displacing more than 3.6 million people and destroying the region's infrastructure, sanitation systems, and telecommunications lines. Many places in the Global South are also under threat by polluted air and water, and toxic waste brought about largely by global economic forces, such as the Koko toxic waste dump in Nigeria,⁸ and Niger Delta oil spills poisoning the water and agricultural lands. Though not figuring explicitly in climate crisis narratives, other hazardous elements continually infiltrate the soil and water, such as "hormone-altering pollutants" that "have affected more than 200 animal species around the world" and caused "increased rates of disease, cancer, or loss of habitat."⁹ A striking instance of such environmental degradation affecting nonhuman species is presented by Joni Adamson who calls attention to the declining number of pink dolphins in the Amazon basin "by 47 percent" due to "drought, pollution, overfishing, and erosion," as well as "atmospheric temperatures linked to climate change."¹⁰

These examples serve to underline the fact that if catastrophic events and toxic detritus dominate postcolonial environments, it is not because of unremitting geophysical forces veering off course in specific places. But in such places climate crisis and other environmental risks come packaged with economic exploitation; that is why they are sites more intensely exposed to the risks of catastrophic events. According to Bonnie Roose and Alex Hunt, the underlying reason here is the “latter-day colonialism based upon economic and cultural imperialism”¹¹ that has incapacitated social systems for administering sufficient response. In the Global South, as Heise concurs, “human populations and natural systems disproportionately suffer the consequences of economic exploitation, toxification, and climate change.”¹² In other words, environmental challenges in postcolonial contexts are more often than not embroiled within political, social, and economic disputes over unequal distribution of resources. One of the major reasons behind this debate is explained by climate scientist Tim Lenton in “Engines of Life”:

Almost half of the world’s total primary energy supply is consumed by the rich G8 nations, despite their having only 12% of the world’s population. The poorest quarter of humanity consumes less than 3%. For them, even modest increases in per capita energy consumption significantly reduce infant mortality and increase life expectancy.¹³

Although these facts point to current postcolonial realities generating the standard discourses of green imperialism, identifying global environmental crises and the “unevenness of our environmental fate”¹⁴ only with the green imperialism of Western powers maybe insufficient.¹⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty similarly contends that “the familiar narrative of western imperialism [is] necessary but not sufficient for the purpose of comprehending the current crisis.”¹⁶ The present situation engendered collectively by the human species, according to him, impels us to rethink *the* very human agency “over multiple . . . scales at once.”¹⁷ At stake here is what emerges out of large-scale environmental disruption and dispossession with devastating effects on the most vulnerable peoples and species. What needs to be recognized at this point is that tailing the climate crises there is planetary pollution hitting those who are the least responsible, regardless of their location. Apparently in this geopolitical struggle, poverty, scarcity of resources, pollution, health risks, political conflicts, social inequality, and toxic environments, as well as “environmentally embedded violence that is often difficult to source,”¹⁸ take center stage on a global level. Two obvious examples would include the category-five hurricane Katrina that hit New Orleans in 2005, killing over 1,800 people, mostly in black neighborhoods, and the May 2014 Soma mine disaster in Turkey leaving 301 miners dead due to poor safety conditions that the company management deliberately ignored for more profit.

This present-day situation signals a cyclical conjunction of repression launched by the global human and global economic forces, which are instrumental in perpetuating racism, sexism, speciesism, and in creating what Sarah Jaquette Ray calls “the ecological other.” Toxic bodies are palpable examples of this form of othering. In the current social (and environmental) moment, the body is a local text of global contexts, becoming an ecological other through the forces of global capitalism that create trajectories of environmental contamination extended into every metabolic

system. The body, then, is an embodiment of toxification of biomes¹⁹ and ecosystems, and thus enacts the ecology of the world, which is, as geographer David Demeritt puts it, “inseparable from the world-shaping network of social practices.”²⁰ As many corrosive environmental and social forces, and especially alien agencies like synthetic chemicals created by science and technology, transit through vulnerable bodies, the body becomes a toxic agent afflicted with long-lasting diseases. Like organic matter, these synthetic forms of human hubris display an agentic capacity due to their active, effective powers. The new materialist theorist Jane Bennett notes that if we want “more ecological and more materially sustainable modes of production and consumption,” we must take them seriously, because these “material powers, which can aid or destroy, enrich or disable, ennoble or degrade us, in many cases call for our attentiveness.”²¹ As such, alien agencies are the major actors of contemporary social and environmental dramas, cultural meanings, and transnational body politics. In material ecocritical terms, the body is seen as a specific instance of the coextensivity of material agencies and biological systems, discriminatory practices and ecological decline. It is through the body that the nonhuman actualizes itself in mutual relations to the human.

And here, in this continual confrontation of the human with the nonhuman, is where the body becomes a sociopolitical palimpsest, that gets culturally inscribed, socially negotiated and commodified, materially crisscrossed, hybridized, toxified, and inevitably immersed in polluted environments. Entangled in environmental transformations, geopolitical forces, social injustices, the body eventually becomes, as Sarah Jaquette Ray also observes, “the site of traffic between culture and nature.”²² It is, then, not too surprising to see that the body serves as a site for cultural critique of its material connections with the more-than-human-environment. As human corporeality gets intimately intermeshed with this nonhuman world, it becomes what Stacy Alaimo calls trans-corporeality, revealing “the interchanges and interconnections between various bodily natures.”²³ Alaimo’s concept of trans-corporeality is significant in explaining how “human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors”²⁴ are mutually caught up in the traffic of anthropogenic transformations. It is in this context that we need to understand the transformation of the toxic body into the ecological other. Forming highly disconcerted partnerships with often incalculable alien agencies inevitably makes the body toxic. These alien agencies braided into bodies in the darkest incitement of trans-global ecologies manifest as immortal microbes, resilient viruses, and undisposable pesticides and herbicides. That is why this partnership today has taken an utterly uncanny turn with globally felt destructive effects especially when we consider bodies that are sexed, gendered, racially differentiated, and socially categorized. Nonhuman bodies, too, incontestably suffer, perhaps even more intensely, the effects of unpredictable material agencies, and of human exploitative practices, emissions, and climate change. It is well known that within the regulatory practices many nonhuman bodies are “tailored to fit . . . market slots.”²⁵ In short, the livestock biomass, wildlife, humans, and other life forms are tangled in a common, trans-corporeal destiny. The essential logic of this destiny is registered at a key moment when, in Serenella Iovino’s words, “material substances interfere and intermingle with each other, determining the world as a site of ongoing hybridizations, from evolutionary processes to environmentally related illness.”²⁶ Hence, becoming maps of contamination, human and

nonhuman bodies increasingly reflect this dynamic process in illness, toxicity, and hybridity, and need to be examined from a perspective that acknowledges the complicity of toxic forces and practices in perpetuating ecological otherness. Material ecocriticism specifically provides this perspective.

Material ecocriticism peruses the body as a *material* text, in which cultural practices, political and economic decisions, and natural processes are deeply entwined. If we explore bodies as “compounds of flesh, elemental properties, and symbolic imaginaries,” we see that they are “living texts that recount *naturalcultural* stories.”²⁷ Like all material agencies, bodies tell stories: stories of social choices and political decisions, of natural dynamics and cultural practices, and of environmental risks and health issues. The most conspicuous of these stories are those of corporeal porousness and environmental pollution. In this sense, bodies are vast archives of toxic substances and discourses, and political, social, and medical conflicts. One of the best examples of this vision is offered by environmental historian Nancy Langston in her gripping book *Toxic Bodies* (2010). She claims that bodies are not categorically isolated entities, but internal ecosystems, and they always form a “dynamic ecological relationship”²⁸ with the environment. “Like most ecosystems,” she continues to argue, “the body undergoes disturbances from natural toxins, parasites, solar radiation, and mutagens.”²⁹ Her analysis of the effects of the hormone disruptor diethylstilbestrol (DES) on women’s bodies is particularly relevant for understanding the emergence of toxic bodies through which poisonous material agencies and exploitative human practices have created horrific interactions. Although DES is no longer used, “live-stock continue to be treated with steroids,” Langston writes, “while pesticides continue to proliferate in the food supply.” She also refers to the reports of “intersex fish and cancer-ridden whales”³⁰ exposed to plastics such as bisphenol A. “Toxic chemicals,” she announces, “have the potential to cross the boundaries between species and generations, altering the hormone systems that shape our internal ecosystems of health, as well as our relationship with the broader ecosystems around us.”³¹ They do not dissolve in the environment, but accumulate in the soil and waters, and move up the food chain. I highlight this example because it provides a comprehensive narrative framework for the permeable materiality of this world where bodies evidently enact the motion of *naturalcultural* processes, revealing layers of meanings hidden in them. Like all beings, we are crisscrossed and cohabited by other life forms, such as bacteria and microbes, from which we can never completely disengage. As in Langston’s example of DES, or pharmaceuticals that interact with our metabolism, we are also intimately linked with xenobiotic substances (chemical compounds). When these “deviant agencies of xenobiotic chemicals,” as Alaimo names them,³² are discharged into the lakes, rivers, and seas, they also alter the metabolism of nonhuman bodies, such as the androgynous fish detected in rivers. Although such ecological others are thought to undermine nature, as Sarah Jaquette Ray rightly claims, they are “doubly victimized; their *physical*, material bodies often bear the costs of environmental exploitation, and their bodies are *discursively* perceived as threats to national, racial, or corporeal purity.”³³

Ironically, however, as the new materialist scholars frequently point out, no human body is purely human. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett famously invokes “bacteria colonies in human elbows to show how human subjects are themselves nonhuman, alien, outside, vital materiality.”³⁴ Bennett proposes a conception of the human as

“an assemblage of microbes, animals, plants, metals, chemicals”³⁵ to explain how the human is always entangled with the nonhuman. Similarly, in Donna Haraway’s account, the human and nonhuman interchanges and coexistence are never mutually beneficent, but a problematic “motley of associations”³⁶ always emerging in combination with regimes of power, cultural experiences, and social discourses. What is important in this line of argument is that all bodies exist in what Bennett calls “an interstitial field of nonpersonal, ahuman forces, flows, tendencies, and trajectories”³⁷ that extend into corporeal and social dimensions. Even as I endorse this new materialist conceptualization, my purpose here is not to celebrate the notion of human and nonhuman assemblages as the new epistemic model, but instead to explore how the ahuman forces (like viruses, bacteria, parasites, and microbes) can produce ecologically othered toxic bodies which become characteristic sites of interesting stories on ecological otherness. Conceived this way, the new materialist theories can be read as a sort of prequel to material ecocriticism’s invocation of the body as a living text. What I intend to foreground here is the idea that interacting in complex ways with organic and inorganic matter, bodies are obviously storied landscapes where matter and meaning are inextricably interconnected. I thus draw a material ecocritical vision of the toxic body as a congealing of biological and discursive processes through which toxic agencies and discourses transit, impressing their visible marks. If we see the body as living text, we can understand the naturalcultural stories of ecological otherness that are materially carved onto it. Many forms of subjugation and otherness, alongside a motley of eco-crisis stories, “are scripted onto material bodies.”³⁸ From this perspective, whether toxic or not, bodies are always tangles of natures and cultures, and stories and ecologies. Understanding this relationship is essential in understanding the mechanisms of ecological otherness, and the key to liberation lies in a non-anthropocentrically reconfigured reality. It means, as material ecocriticism posits, inducing “a transformation in plotting ‘dis-anthropocentric’ disciplinary discourses and political, cultural, and ethical models.”³⁹ Practically, this also means that our discourses and social models, scientific and cultural practices, and literary texts are never separate from the natural dynamics of the planet’s ecosystemic processes. Material ecocriticism, therefore, invites us to closely observe the ways in which nature and culture become confluent, permeable, and porous, a process which is best discerned in the becoming of toxic bodies. The ecologies of the world meet and combine with the ecologies of bodies, inscribing naturalcultural stories of their interconnectedness.

The instances of the confluence between bodies and toxic substances, natures, and cultures can be found in many literary texts, which capture the composition of toxic bodies. As Ursula Heise explains, contemporary novelists “use chemical substances as a trope for the blurring of boundaries between body and environment, public and domestic space, and harmful and beneficial technologies.”⁴⁰ In what follows, a brief reading of two novels by a Turkish and an American author may help to substantiate my argument that the stories bodies tell about their trans-corporeal dynamics reflect the dangerous circulation of alien agencies and toxic discourses across living bodies regardless of national boundaries as well. In particular, *Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills* (1983) by Latife Tekin and *Gain* (1998) by Richard Powers epitomize how “the environmental crisis is really the crisis of the body.”⁴¹ Moreover, they effectively capture bodily stories by telling gripping and intimate tales about ecological

otherness. In more general terms, however, embodying postcolonial and material ecocritical perspectives in a balanced way, they alert us to the socio-ecological significance of the mesh of human and other-than-human environments. I want to show that, regardless of their local differences (concerning Turkish and American cultures), these two texts reveal vividly that hazardous material agencies are oblivious to all class, gender, culture, or species boundaries.

Turkish ecofeminist novelist Latife Tekin's tragicomic novel, *Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills* (1983), is one of the most striking literary examples that demonstrate the powerful effect of chemicals in producing toxic bodies. Tekin presents a group of desperately poor and illiterate people who try to make a living on a garbage hill, which is ironically called Flower Hill, on the outskirts of Istanbul in the 1960s. Next to the garbage hill is a chemical factory, which further contaminates the area. The people who immigrated here live in tiny shacks built out of old tin cans and scraps of wood and cardboard found in the garbage dump, scavenge for food, and struggle against the factory's poisoning toxins. Their huts are bulldozed many times only to be rebuilt again and again. One snowy night their roofs are torn away by the wind, with babies in cradles flying away. But the worst disaster that follows comes from the factory that illegally pollutes the water and air. It begins with the snow-like fallout dispatched from the factory whose effect unfolds quickly on the bodies of the hut people, who are already enmeshed in detritus. "The hut people seemed no longer human," writes Tekin, "smeared with dust, mud, garbage."⁴² Exposed to the gridlock of toxins, children stop growing and adults develop ulcers and running sores.⁴³

Since they are desperate to clean themselves, but have no clean water even to drink, the residents of the garbage hill find relief in the mysterious blue water. Changes start appearing in those who wash in the blue water. "The skin of some began to peel while the faces of others turned purple. Bright blue spots came on the children's bodies and the hair of two women went white."⁴⁴ This bodily transformation is the first sign of their metamorphosis into toxic bodies. "Their spines caved in, flaccid as dough."⁴⁵ Tekin also says that "waste matter spoiled the earth, and the earth colour turned red while the blue plaster on the hut-walls rotted away."⁴⁶ It is not only the human body that suffers from the effects of life-threatening toxins; gradually "the unfolding of slow violence"⁴⁷ manifests on the landscape. Flowers and trees wither, seagulls are gone, chickens refuse to eat anything, and the dogs die. What emerges, then, is a systematic toxification of biological existence on the Flower Hill that gets plunged into abject misery with human and nonhuman bodies framed as ultimate ecological others. Toxic chemicals on Flower Hill internally bear witness to their oppression materially and culturally, relegating the bodies of the people to radical alterity.

Richard Powers's *Gain* (1998) is another noteworthy novel that offers a similar instance of this process, disclosing how the female protagonist Laura's body turns into a toxic one through the occluded relationship between chemicals and human corporeality. Laura Bodey is an estate agent in Lacewood, Illinois, where the chemical factory Clare has been operating since the 19th century. Clare produces soap, fertilizers, super-pesticides, bleaches, agricultural chemicals, floor wax, pharmaceuticals, artificial cheese, and house siding, as well as nitrogen tetroxide, polyethylene plastic, "aluminum sulfate, aluminum silicate, titanium dioxide, hydrated silica, hydrated alumina, tale, barium sulfate . . . polyacrylamide resins . . . and asbestos."⁴⁸ Like other houses in Lacewood, Laura's house is filled with Clare products: "Clare hiding under

the sink, swarming her medicine chest, lining the shelves in the basement, parked out in the garage, piled up in the shed.”⁴⁹ After Laura is diagnosed with ovarian cancer, she realizes that nothing is safe from these chemicals: “Garden sprays. Cooking oils. Cat litter. Dandruff shampoo. Art supplies. Varnish. Deodorant. Moisturizers. Concealers. Water. Air. The whole planet, a superfund site.”⁵⁰ Laura is right in stating that toxicity impinges on the entire planet. Her example indicates that the toxic body is not always a postcolonial one when it becomes a symbolic site of political contestation and power struggle between the law firm that files a lawsuit and Clare that creates and thrives in “toxic, trans-corporeal, material places.”⁵¹ The power of alien agencies is thus not only amplified by the vulnerability of ecosystems, but also compounded by political decisions.

As these two literary texts illustrate dramatically, unlike natural toxins, like poisonous mushrooms that “have a threshold of safety,”⁵² all synthetic chemicals exhibit adverse effects, creating permeable boundaries of contamination between bodies, soil, water, and air. Their power is reflected upon animals, plants, and as Ray states, more visibly on “disenfranchised groups – communities of color, women and children” who are, like the garbage hill people, “disproportionately burdened with the costs of environmental degradation.”⁵³ But as emphasized in Laura’s story, no one is exempt from their deadly impact. While disadvantaged groups like the garbage people are treated as ecological others “on the grounds of race, gender, ability, nationality, and environmental behavior,”⁵⁴ people like Laura, who are supposedly more privileged in class and/or nationality, also suffer from this curse. Knowing no boundaries, alien agencies travel on complex pathways of trans-corporeality, within and across bodies, both in postcolonial environments and Western geographies, producing what Serenella Iovino and I call “hybrid collectives of humans and nonhumans.”⁵⁵ Latife Tekin’s statement I cited above, that the “hut people seemed no longer human,” instantiates the toxic aspect of this collective hybridity well, while Richard Powers’s *Gain* epitomizes the body as a material text of complexly interconnected ecological, ethical, political, and social forces. This is not a cooperative configuration, but a corrosive hybridization of human and nonhuman agencies, displaying the stark reality of alien kinships.

Unlike the disabled body that encounters social exclusion and social alienation, the toxic body in this configuration is a figure of ecological otherness in the sense of being a small ecosystem gone awry. If only for this reason, we need to listen to the clarion call sent out by toxic bodies for developing new forms of awareness about ecological otherness. We all dwell in a world crisscrossed by deviant agencies that now populate the Earth. Since these xenobiotic forces and substances have the power to reshape bodies and disrupt physical environments, we must pay close attention to their often unpredictable agentic dimension. Agency manifests in many ways, and even in garbage, as Jane Bennett and Latife Tekin in their respective theoretical and fictional frameworks have shown, there is vibrant materiality that evades human control. In a more radical perspective, whether it is detrimental or not, matter in all its formations (alien agencies like synthetic chemicals, organic compounds, metals, and minerals, or human and nonhuman bodies) is the co-producer of planetary realities and literary and cultural imagination. Therefore, decoding the meanings disseminated across material flows, substances, and forces that form a web of entangled relations with the human reality, can move our vision “from the language of

otherness to that of differential co-emergence.”⁵⁶ When ecosystems, climate, species, and human cultures intersect in pollution, poverty, species extinction, depletion of local ecosystems, global warming, disseminated toxic matter, and other ecological problems, they collectively signal the necessity to change our anthropocentric values and destructive practices.

ENDNOTES

1. Patricia Yaeger, “The Death of Nature and the Apotheosis of Trash; or, Rubbish Ecology.” *PMLA* 123.2 (March 2008): 332.
2. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 30.
3. Ursula Heise, “Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism.” *PMLA* 128.3 (May 2013), 638.
4. On the definition of postcolonial ecocriticism and its subjects, themes, and topics, see Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin’s “Introduction” and the first chapter, “Development” in their book, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2010). Other influential publications instituting postcolonial and ecocritical perspectives include Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson, and George B. Handley, eds., *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005); the special cluster on postcolonial ecocriticism edited by Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughrey in the Winter 2007 issue of *ISLE*; Helen Tiffin, ed., *Five Emus to the King of Siam: Environment and Empire* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007); Laura Wright, *Wilderness into Civilized Shapes: Reading the Postcolonial Environment* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010); Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt, eds., *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010); Pablo Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010); Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley, eds., *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Simon C. Estok and Wong-Chung Kim, eds., *East Asian Ecocriticism: A Critical Reader* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).
5. Postcolonial critics have also realized that contemporary power structures and conflicts over geopolitical issues are inseparable from fundamental environmental questions, such as the use of energy, depleting natural resources, global pollution, and concerns over social injustices in the changing climate. See Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) and “Why Planet? Intellectual Autobiography.” In *The Endangered Planet in Literature* (IV. International Conference of Literatures in English. Selected Proceedings), ed. Barry Tharaud and Elizabeth Pallito (Istanbul: Doğuş University, 2005), 15–29; Robert J.C. Young, “Postcolonial Remains.” *New Literary History* 43.2 (Winter 2012): 19–42; Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses.” *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2009): 197–222, and “Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change.” *New Literary History* 43.1 (Winter 2012): 1–18.
6. Greta Gaard, “Global Warming Narratives.” In *The Future of Ecocriticism*, ed. Serpil Oppermann, Ufuk Özdağ, Nevin Özkan, and Scott Slovic (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 52.
7. Simon C. Estok, “Afterword: Reckoning with Irreversibilities in Biotic and Political Ecologies.” Spec. issue on “Postcolonial Ecocriticism Among Settler-Colonial Nations,” ed. Travis V. Mason, Lisa Szabo-Jones, and Elzette Steenkamp. *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 44.4 (2014): 220.

8. Between August 1987 and May 1988, 4,000 tons of toxic wastes were dumped in Koko, Nigeria.
9. Malin Ah-King and Eva Hayward, "Toxic Sexes: Perverting Pollution and Queering Hormone Disruption." *O-Zone: A Journal of Object Oriented Studies* 1 (Autumn 2013): 5.
10. Joni Adamson, "Environmental Justice, Cosmopolitics, and Climate Change." In *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment*, ed. Louise Westling (New York: The University of Cambridge Press, 2013), 169.
11. Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt, "Introduction: Narratives of Survival, Sustainability, and Justice." In *Postcolonial Green*, ed. Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 2.
12. Heise, "Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism," 639.
13. Tim Lenton, "Engines of Life: Review of Vaclav Smill's *Energy in Nature and Society*." *Nature* 452.10 (April 2008): 691–692.
14. See Mark Whitehead, *Environmental Transformations: A Geography of the Anthropocene* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 7. Whitehead argues that there is a "problem with thinking about environmental problems in global terms alone," and that "the inhabited areas that are most likely to suffer the worst impacts of climate change are Africa and South Asia" (p. 7). Though this is undeniable, I would stress the fact that the poor communities in the Global North are also involuntarily exposed to climate-related diseases and the uneven impacts of climate change.
15. On this point, see Malcolm Sen's essay, "Spatial Justice: The Ecological Imperative and Postcolonial Development." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 45.4 (December 2009): 365–367.
16. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Brute Force." *Eurozine*, October 7, 2010, 2.
17. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change." *New Literary History* 43.1 (Winter 2012): 1.
18. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 7.
19. Biomes are regional or global biotic communities, usually characterized by a dominant vegetation, such as a grassland, forest, tundra, or desert, with a prevailing climate.
20. David Demeritt, "The Construction of Global Warming and the Politics of Science." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91.2 (June 2001): 312.
21. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), ix.
22. Sarah Jaquette Ray, *The Ecological Other: Environmental Exclusion in American Culture* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2013), 9. Ray uses the term "corporeal ecology" (p. 16) to explain the connections between environments and bodies.
23. Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 2.
24. Ibid.
25. Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 25.
26. Serenella Iovino, "Bodies of Naples: Stories, Matter, and the Landscapes of Porosity." In *Material Ecocriticism*, ed. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 101.
27. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, "Introduction: Stories Come to Matter." In *Material Ecocriticism*, ed. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 6.
28. Nancy Langston, *Toxic Bodies: Hormone Disruptors and the Legacy of DES* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 147.
29. Ibid., 149.

30. Ibid., xii.
31. Ibid., 2.
32. Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 139.
33. Ray, *The Ecological Other*, 9.
34. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 120.
35. Ibid.
36. Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 250.
37. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 61.
38. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, "Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory." In *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 8.
39. Iovino and Oppermann, "Introduction: Stories Come to Matter," 8.
40. Ursula Heise, "Toxins, Drugs, and Global Systems: Risk and Narrative in Contemporary Novel." *American Literature* 74.4 (December 2002): 748.
41. Ray, *The Ecological Other*, 60.
42. Latife Tekin, *Berji Kristin: Tales From the Garbage Hills*. Trans. Ruth Christie and Saliha Peker, 1983; rpt. (London: Marion Boyars, 1996), 22.
43. Ibid., 60.
44. Ibid., 29.
45. Ibid., 35.
46. Ibid., 47.
47. Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 51.
48. Richard Powers, *Gain* (New York: Picador, 1998), 393.
49. Ibid., 345.
50. Ibid., 323.
51. Stacy Alaimo, "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature." In *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 261.
52. Langston, *Toxic Bodies*, 6.
53. Ray, *The Ecological Other*, 23.
54. Ibid., 24.
55. Iovino and Oppermann, "Introduction: Stories Come to Matter," 10.
56. Serpil Oppermann, "Material Ecocriticism: and the Creativity of Storied Matter." Spec. issue on "Ecocriticism." *Frame: Journal of Literary Studies* 26.2 (November 2013): 69.

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CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

RETHINKING POSTCOLONIAL RESISTANCE IN NIGER-DELTA LITERATURE

An ecocritical reading of Okpewho's
Tides and Ojaide's *The Activist*



Cajetan N. Iheka

In “A Thriving Postcolonialism: Toward an Anti-Postcolonial Discourse,” Grant Farred suggests that postcolonialism “has to be at once politically new (and renewed) and old.”¹ While Farred agrees that certain strategies of the “anticolonial struggle” are worth keeping, he insists that the new postcolonialism “has to distinguish what was efficacious [in the anticolonial struggle] from what was not, what can be applied to the new terrain and what cannot.”² I begin my chapter with Farred’s work because of its call for a postcolonialism that revises or at least rethinks the anticolonial strategies of the old colonial and postcolonial liberation struggles. More specifically, Farred’s work opens up a space for the case I make about rethinking violence as a strategy of postcolonial resistance in the Niger-Delta context discussed in this chapter.

Among other things, postcolonialism – in both its political and intellectual ramifications – inherited the justification of violent resistance from the anticolonial struggle, that is the kind we saw with the popular Mau Mau insurrection against colonialism in Kenya and the militancy of the African National Congress (ANC) youth wing against Apartheid in South Africa, among others. We ought to recall that Frantz Fanon also endorsed such armed confrontation with his call for revolution against the colonial forces in *The Wretched of the Earth*.³ Inspired by Fanon, postcolonial scholars – from earlier decolonization to more recent times – have often celebrated violence as a strategy of resistance, as is evident in the Niger-Delta examples I highlight in this essay. However, I believe that the reconstitution of a new kind of postcolonialism must entail a reconsideration of potentially catastrophic strategies because of the ecological degradation that often results from such modes of opposition. Postcolonialism needs to be attuned to the ecological implications of colonial and neocolonial oppression and ensure that its responses are not complicit in the problems it seeks to address.

Take the Niger-Delta case, for example. Since 2005, several militant groups have taken up arms against the Nigerian state and the oil companies for the degradation of the Delta environment through decades of oil exploration. While the agency of the armed youth is manifested in bombing oil installations and oil bunkering, which involves scooping oil and selling the unrefined crude through illegal channels, as

well as kidnapping oil workers and politicians, the palpable threats posed by global warming and climate change call for a reassessment of such activities. Put differently, if the kind of violence unleashed by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) can be considered as an inheritance from the anticolonial struggle, the contributions of such forms of opposition to environmental degradation in an era of ecological decline warrants the search for more efficacious strategies.

In this essay, I focus on two Niger-Delta novels, Isidore Okpewho's *Tides* (1993) and Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* (2006), to show the limitations of violence as a mode of resistance in the Delta and to suggest other approaches crucial for what Farred describes as "the new terrain of struggle" in postcolonialism.⁴ I favor literary narratives, as distinct from merely empirical accounts, for the important role they "play in drawing attention to and shaping our ideas about catastrophic and long-term environmental challenges" such as the ecological devastation ongoing in the Delta.⁵

While critics of Niger-Delta postcolonial literature, including Charles C. Feghabo and Sunny Ahwefada, have often celebrated violence in Okpewho's and Ojaide's works, I seek to reveal how insights from ecocriticism complicate and interrogate such endorsements of insurgency. Charles C. Feghabo, for instance, argues that "Okpewho's vision of the triumph of the oppressed people of the Niger Delta through a revolution becomes glaring" from Bickerbug's bombing of oil infrastructure in the novel.⁶ Similarly, Sunny Ahwefada argues that oil bunkering in *The Activist* amounts to a subversive act perpetrated for the betterment of the people.⁷ In contrast, I argue that celebrating near catastrophic acts like bombing oil installations and oil bunkering ignores the devastating ecological footprint they leave behind. In reading these narratives, I intend to enrich our understanding of Niger-Delta literature and contribute to the burgeoning field of postcolonial ecocriticism. According to Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers, postcolonial ecocriticism draws "attention to both global imperial contexts and parts of the world often elided" by western ecocriticism's focus on primarily American and British cultural productions.⁸ I envisage a kind of postcolonial ecocriticism that emphasizes the imbrication of humans and nonhumans and decenters humans as the locus of environmental criticism. My emphasis on ecological survival is important because focusing mainly on humans runs the risk of reifying the anthropocentric positioning of the environment that led to problems these Niger-Delta texts critique in the first place.

In following this argument that emphasizes a symbiotic relationship between humans and nonhumans, my essay is informed by Timothy Morton's idea of ecological thought. In *The Ecological Thought* (2010), Morton suggests that both nature and culture interact and are transformed by their interactions. Morton's point is particularly germane for postcolonial societies, where the colonizers altered the land with the introduction of plants and crops that complicated the idea of the natural. The interaction of people with their environment shows an interplay of nature and culture that gets lost when we focus mainly on humans in environmental criticism. Morton also undercuts human exceptionalism when he stresses the interplay of human and nonhumans, and insists that we redefine our notion of personhood to include other beings we do not normally ascribe to the same category. In his view, it is important to "treat many more beings as people while deconstructing our ideas of what counts as people."⁹

According to Morton, the main point is “thinking big,” which contrasts with the notion of “thinking small” in terms of the locale or place, and thinking in terms of only human interests. For Morton, “thinking big” allows for a recognition of the interdependence of humans and nonhumans, an idea he describes as the mesh. In his words, “[a]ll life forms are the mesh, and so are all dead ones, as are their habitat which are also made up of living and nonliving beings.”¹⁰ Morton enjoins humans to consider animals and other environmental elements as “strange strangers” to enable a recognition of the familiarity and intimacy we share with them despite their strangeness. Morton’s term emphasizes the radical alterity of nonhumans and the impossibility of knowing them. As he puts it, “we can’t predict or anticipate just who or what – and can we tell between ‘who’ and ‘what,’ and how can we tell?”¹¹

Morton is not so naïve as to ignore the uncertainty that characterizes ecological thought. He draws attention to debates concerning the rationality and capacity for suffering of nonhumans and asks if these really matter:

We can’t be sure whether sentient beings are machines or not. And it would be dangerous if we thought we could. . . . However much we try, we can’t explain the strange stranger away. We’re stuck with the paradoxes of pure appearance.¹²

He also opposes the tendency to use the idea of consciousness to demonstrate human superiority over other species. As Morton writes: “The ecological thought should not set consciousness up as yet another defining trait of superiority over nonhumans. Our minds are hugely quantitatively different from other terrestrial minds but perhaps not qualitatively.”¹³ In other words, the crux of the author’s argument is that there is uncertainty concerning nonhuman beings because we as humans cannot really know them. Hence, the term “strange strangers” dictates that the inconclusive debates on their capacities should not be the basis for denying them equivalence.

Although Morton’s work can be critiqued for not addressing the power structures and inequalities that characterize our neoliberal society, I find his work useful because of the redefinition of personhood he envisages, his obliteration of a center in ecological thought, and his insistence on recognizing nonhumans as “strange strangers” regardless of their capacities. The strength of Morton’s work for this inquiry relies on the decentering of the human and the fact that he does not consider reason or sentience the key parameters for recognizing nonhumans. That their existence is enough to compel our intimacy and respect for them is pivotal for discussing the Niger-Delta environment in this essay. Morton’s ecological thought holds us to a larger conception of the environment that caters not only to our interests as humans. Rather, he compels us to conceive of a broader ecological ethic that serves the larger interests of the different beings inhabiting the environment. So while I do not eschew or denigrate the history of colonial and postcolonial armed struggles – the Fanonian legacy of the twentieth century – I attempt to argue for an activism that is based on the conceptualization of communities or collectivities based on a symbiotic relationship between humans and the world they inhabit.

THE NIGER-DELTA UNVEILED

Since texts are “always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society,” as Edward Said reminds us,¹⁴ it is important to explore briefly the history of the Niger-Delta region before discussing Okpewho’s and Ojaide’s narratives. The Niger-Delta is an important site from which to consider the effects of globalization and resource extraction in Africa.¹⁵ The Delta’s proximity to the Atlantic Ocean makes it accessible to foreigners and it has allowed the region to engage in trade with outsiders since the sixteenth century.¹⁶ It is considered one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world and it is home to over forty ethnic groups, including the Ogonis, Ijaws, Urhobos, and Itsekiris.¹⁷ Despite these communities’ variations, they share certain similarities – for example, the fact that fishing and farming are mainstays of their traditional economy. J.S. Oboreh reports that, “prior to oil exploitation and exploration, the Niger Delta region had been a peaceful place with fishing and farming as the main means of livelihood of its denizens.”¹⁸ Oboreh adds that the region “has suffered from environmental degradation and deprivation” since oil exploration started in the region.¹⁹ Shell achieved a major breakthrough in their exploration activity in 1956 by discovering oil in commercial quantities in the Delta.²⁰ The first oil tanker left Oloibiri in 1958, but as Rob Nixon critically asks, “[w]ho could have dreamed in 1958 that four decades and \$600 billion of oil revenues later, some 90 million Nigerians would be surviving on less than a dollar a day?”²¹ The poverty underscored in Nixon’s rhetorical question is entrenched in the Niger Delta where oil companies’ operations have polluted the lands and the rivers.

Not surprisingly, the people of the Delta have taken up what Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez Alier describe as the “environmentalism of the poor.”²² The people’s grouse, as represented in *Tides* and *The Activist*, is the destruction of their environment and means of livelihood caused by oil exploration activities. Since the late 1990s, violent activities including the kidnapping of oil workers and bombing of oil installations in the Delta have been carried out by different groups, the most notable being the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).²³ MEND has claimed responsibility for several militant activities since 2005 and it was one of the groups that accepted the amnesty program of the late President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua in 2009.²⁴ Although the spate of militancy has significantly diminished since the beginning of the amnesty program, the people in the oil producing communities continue to claim that there is no substantial development of their region or change in the operational procedures of the oil companies for environmental sustainability. Gas continues to flare day and night nonstop, oil continues to spill, and the environment continues to suffer. It is no wonder the area is often cited for the illustration of the resource curse in Africa. The Delta is also the setting of a corpus of literary works, including those analyzed in the following sections.

BOMBING OR TALKING THROUGH THE TIDES?

Set between 25 August 1976 and 28 February 1978, Okpewho’s epistolary novel follows a literary tradition popularized by Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter* (1981) in African literature. The novel records letter exchanges between two friends: Piriye and Tonwe. Piriye also associates with a radical activist named Bickerbug who launches

tirades against the government and oil companies for the exploitation of the Deltan communities. At the end of the novel, Bickerbug is arrested after having blown up a bridge in Lagos, several oil installations in the Delta, and the Kwarafa Dam.

In reading Okpewho's novel, one can see the limitations of Bickerbug's violent revolution; I also point to the non-violent forms of opposition centered on collaboration/collectivity, which the epistolary narrative suggests. Of particular interest are Bickerbug's devastating activities at the end of the novel since they ironically endanger the environment he is fighting to protect. Paying attention to the militancy of Bickerbug is also important because it has implications for the discussion of the "resurgence of the insurgency in the area years after its publication."²⁵

Feghabo compares Bickerbug to Ken Saro-Wiwa, arguing that Bickerbug's portrayal as a "non-materialistic and non-ideological activist truly devoted to the salvation of his people matches Saro-Wiwa's personality. Like Bickerbug, he was a graduate of English, not known for materialism, or as a Marxist."²⁶ Although there are similarities between Bickerbug and the late environmentalist, Bickerbug's insurgency radically sets him apart from Saro-Wiwa whose principle of non-violence is known to have influenced environmental movements across the world.

Bickerbug's militancy is significant for drawing attention to the plight of the Delta in the novel, but it is also problematic. His actions are actually inimical to the environment they purportedly seek to safeguard. In other words, the fact that his actions are dangerous to the "persons" in the local environment calls for a reassessment of the celebratory readings by critics like Feghabo. Here one can recognize persons in the way Morton would approve of, namely to cover both the human and nonhuman beings in the environment. I argue that while Bickerbug's violent activities draw attention to the problems, showcase the agency of the participants, and represent legible assertion of a right to a better life, they are also injurious not only to fellow humans but to the strange strangers in the environment as well.

Scholars have distinguished between eco-terrorism and environmental terrorism and their work is useful for a reading of Bickerbug's character. While both forms are considered terrorist acts, their difference, as DeMond Shondell Miller, Jason David Rivera, and Joel C. Yelin see it, is "in the targets they choose: environmental terrorists target natural resources, whereas eco-terrorists target human made structures (including technologies used to destroy natural resources in defense of natural resources)."²⁷ According to this distinction, Bickerbug can be considered an eco-terrorist given that his targets are not natural resources like the River Niger or the land, but oil rigs and the Kainji Dam. These edifices are primarily human-made structures meant to control natural resources – crude oil and water, respectively. In blowing up these structures, Bickerbug registers a strong protest against the government and the oil company for the despoliation of the environment. More importantly, he wants to return the land and water to a "natural" state. But as the novel suggests, such return to an originary moment is impossible. Bickerbug tells Piriye after his arrest: "Our people have won. [. . .] The water is flowing again, full stream. The tides are here again. Soon there'll be plenty of fishes swimming again, eh?"²⁸ Bickerbug's celebratory tone ignores the extent of ecological damage to the environment as I discuss later. In fact, rather than return us to an original state, his actions compound the ecological problems he is invested in. His activities seem typical of what Morton calls "'one at a time' sequencing."²⁹ Morton uses this term to describe the tendency

in environmentalism to fixate on certain aspects of the environment while ignoring others. For Morton, the idea of the mesh and the interconnections of its constituents make such thinking irrelevant. In Okpewho's novel, Bickerbug is fixated on ensuring the flowing of the river, while ignoring the ecological issues it raises about the other life forms in this environment.

In his last letter to Piriye, Tonwe describes the devastation of the Delta environment by the bombing of the installations. Tonwe tells his interlocutor that he "cannot imagine how much oil is floating about now in these creeks. It is better seen than described."³⁰ Tonwe registers the representational challenge of using writing to convey the enormity of the pollution caused by Bickerbug. Tonwe's insistence on physical witnessing shows the limit of language to convey the enormity of the tragedy. Blowing up one installation is already detrimental to the environment, but blowing up five located in different villages suggests the pollution of a vast expanse of landscape and waterscape by the spillage. If we ask Morton, he will remind us that "there is always more than our point of view," and that the environment "is made of strange strangers."³¹

The image presented in Tonwe's last letter surely undermines Bickerbug's claim that the water is flowing and plenty of fish are swimming again. If at all, it will be water contaminated by oil spills and rendered useless as a habitat for aquatic beings and a source of replenishment. Worth recalling as well is that Lati, the journalist wife of Piriye, who traveled to cover the destruction of the Kwarafa Dam, is still missing when the novel ends. As the hospital search remains futile, so does hope of her being found alive. Lati can be identified as a symbol of the human toll of the explosions, but we should not stop there. If oil spillage is an example of "slow violence" that happens gradually and out of sight, as Rob Nixon astutely explains it, the passage invites us to transcend the spectacular and arresting image portrayed by Tonwe's letter and reflect on the long-term consequence of the explosions for various beings.

Bickerbug's actions fall short of Morton's requirement for ecological thought insofar as they do not recognize the coexistence of other beings and the translation of his actions onto them. In their work in which they contest the appropriateness of terrorism for describing the destruction of property by environmental activists, David Thomas Sumner and Lisa M. Wiedman contend that while terrorists do not care about life, for "environmental activists, however, the sacredness of life is the motivating idea for their actions."³² Sumner and Wiedman's work is relevant for insisting on the respect for life as an important factor in environmental activism, just as Morton's is for urging readers to respect the importance of all lives and the interconnection of beings inhabiting the environment. Bickerbug's environmentalism fails because his actions do not bear witness to the sanctity of lives in the environment. Whether it is the humans killed from the explosions or the "strange strangers" in the land and rivers, what is at stake is the violation of lives. In fact, one might conclude that Bickerbug fails to "think big."

OIL BUNKERING AND ACTIVISM IN OJAIDE'S NARRATIVE

Like Okpewho's text, Ojaide's *The Activist* also explores the destruction of the Niger-Delta environment and its people by the oil companies and the federal military

government. Like Piriye, Tonwe, and Bickerbug in *Tides*, the Activist, the novel's protagonist who is only known by this name, is an intellectual. But while Bickerbug blows up installations in *Tides*, the Activist participates in oil bunkering business, which positions him as an eco-terrorist since he is damaging man-made structures built for transporting crude oil from the rig. Another remarkable distinction is that Ojaide's novel introduces a gendered perspective to the Niger-Delta problem, which I discuss in the next section. Unlike *Tides*, Ojaide's novel foregrounds the participation of women in the Delta struggle. The Activist is excited about the possibility of hurting the oil companies and the government, both of whom he describes as "the two principal outsiders that were robbing and destroying the people of the Niger Delta."³³

Critics like Sunny Ahwefada have hailed the Activist's bunkering business as subversive in that it disrupts the activities of the oil companies.³⁴ There is value in that position, but such perspective does not seem attentive to the larger ecological problems posed by oil bunkering. One can put pressure on that perspective by posing the following questions: does oil bunkering significantly affect the oil company and the government? Does bunkering affect the people positively or negatively? What are the environmental implications of bunkering? In other words, what is the implication of bunkering on beings in the environment?

While it is true that oil companies and the government lose revenue if they are unable to meet their production quota due to bunkering, the loss is negligible in comparison to the problem it poses to humans and nonhumans. Sabotaging the operations of the companies via bunkering is not an antidote to ecological devastation. Instead, it contributes to destroying the environment, providing excuses for the companies not to curtail oil spills, which eventually result in fires. The novel provides examples where the multinational Bell Oil deflected responsibility for spills, arguing instead that the villagers broke the pipeline to extort compensation from the company. The bunkered oil seeps into the land, eroding it for agricultural use and other purposes. As Ngozi Chuma-Udeh remarks in a reading of similar spills in Kaine Agary's novel *Yellow-Yellow*, "[t]he resultant oil spill wrought heavy contamination of land and underground water courses, sometimes more than 40 years after oil spilled."³⁵ Patrick Bond shares a similar view in his foreword to Oriola's *Criminal Resistance*? For him, "[o]il bunkering and pipeline sabotage, for example[,] are similarly fraught given the collateral damage including explosions and ecological devastation."³⁶

The point is that these adverse effects of bunkering need to be considered to rethink the celebration of the Activist's bunkering by critics. According to the novel, bunkering is helpful to the Activist and his business partner, Pere. They not only become rich themselves, but they are able to provide employment opportunities for others. The wealth from the bunkering business is also what enables the Activist to fund his gubernatorial ambition. Without it, the jobs created by the Delta Cartel and the possibility of change brought about by the election of the Activist as governor would be impossible, but one cannot lose sight of its destructive effect on the larger environment.

So far, I have drawn attention to the ecological problems posed by oil bunkering and destroying oil installations. I have shown how Bickerbug's violent actions in Okpewho's novel contribute to the ecological degradation he intends to combat.

Additionally, my reading of Ojaide's novel has highlighted the dangers of oil bunkering to the environment even though the proceeds from the illegal business facilitated the Activist's election as governor later in the novel. Yet the most important contribution of these narratives is that they provide alternative forms of opposition that are attuned to ecological sustainability. The more efficacious alternative forms of the Niger-Delta struggle, which I discuss in the next section, focus on collaboration and reinstate the politics undermined by the resort to arms in the preceding sections.

ECOLOGICAL COLLECTIVITIES

Okpewho's and Ojaide's texts allow us to ponder alternatives to the militancy discussed above. I present these alternatives as ways of practicalizing the ecological thought in the Niger Delta. Morton appropriately titled his final chapter "Forward Thinking," which suggests a step in the future. He contends that the ecological thought "compel[s] us to imagine collectivity rather than community – groups formed by choice rather than by necessity," and that the "ecological thought must imagine economic change."³⁷ However, Morton's work falls short of the programmatic course of action for the formation of the ecological collectivity or even ways of bringing about the economic change. In other words, how do we practice the ecological thought especially in the Niger Delta? In regards to Okpewho's *Tides*, I suggest that its insistence on collaboration through the epistolary form and the open forum I discuss shortly constitute its mode of ecological collectivities. Ojaide's *The Activist*, on the other hand, demonstrates the ecological thought through the collectivities formed by the women who protested against the oil companies, as well as by the electorates who supported the Activist's political ambition and voted for him.

The insistence of *Tides* on collaboration through the epistolary form of the novel is critical. First, the idea of letters implicates an addresser and an addressee, and their collaboration is necessary for communication to take place. The grim, inconclusive ending of the novel makes collaboration particularly germane. As the novel ends, Bickerbug and Tonwe are arrested, while Priboye, the letter carrier, is on the run from the state security operatives. Meanwhile, the pregnant Lati is yet to be found, while the fate of her husband, Piriye, hangs on what the interrogation of Bickerbug and Tonwe would reveal about his complicity. This pessimistic ending of the novel leaves unsolved the Niger-Delta challenges and it undermines the celebratory reading of Bickerbug's revolutionary actions. The ending suggests that we look elsewhere in the narrative for viable alternatives to the grim condition imposed by Bickerbug's insurgent activities.

To look elsewhere is to ponder more seriously the collaboration between Tonwe and Piriye vis-à-vis the form that enables it. Deborah Kaplan, among others, has described the epistolary form as a feminine form.³⁸ It is no coincidence that a female writer, Mariama Ba, popularized this form in African literature. Okpewho's use of a form associated with women writing suggests that alternative feminist forms of mobilization, the kind visible in Ojaide's novel, are critical for addressing the problems in the Delta. Put differently, even if the novel does not foreground female voices in the environmental struggle as Ojaide's novel did, it still appeals to feminist sensibilities through its form that negates the patriarchal destructive impulse of Bickerbug.

Additionally, the form is critical to readers' access of the narrative given the repressive bent of the state in the text. We see how Piriye is harassed by the state security agents for publishing his views on the Delta and Nigeria in different news outlets. Bickerbug is also incarcerated earlier in the narrative for staging rallies where he denounces the government and oil companies. Given these scenarios, the confidentiality of the letter form allows the interlocutors to continue their investigation and offer the narrative as a testament against the devastation of the Delta ecology. The collaborative work of Tonwe and Piriye enable us to witness the environmental drama as they unfold not only in the Delta but in the seat of power in Lagos.

Beyond its form, the novel adumbrates other collectivities, most notably through the "open forum" Bickerbug convenes in prison. It is ironic that the prison becomes a site for Jürgen Habermas's notion of a public sphere in the absence of similar opportunities beyond the prison walls. According to Habermas, the public sphere is a space for debate and interactions independent of the state. In his work on the emergence of the public sphere in England, Germany, and France, Habermas contends that the primary criterion for this sphere was that "they preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether."³⁹ In his view, the public sphere was a space where the quality of the argument rather than social status won the day. The public sphere evolved in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it became fully developed in the nineteenth century, and could be seen in salons, coffee houses, and in the pages of texts like novels and newspapers. In sum, the primary characteristic of this European notion of the public sphere is freedom of expression even when the discourse was oppositional to the state.

Although Habermas's conception of the public sphere has been elaborated and critiqued by scholars, it remains useful for my purposes because it provides insights relevant for discussing Bickerbug's open forum. Habermas's insistence on freedom of expression and the irrelevance of social status to the acceptability of one's viewpoints are critical components of Bickerbug's open forum.⁴⁰ Describing the discussions of the open forum to Tonwe in a letter, Piriye indicates that "[t]he session was also thoroughly democratic – everything was conducted in pidgin so that both the educated and the not so educated could deliberate on equal terms and hold a true dialogue."⁴¹ Readers of the novel will remember the attempts by the state agents to stifle dissent when they clamped down on Bickerbug's public campaigns against corruption. As such, it is significant that the space of confinement becomes a productive space for the unhindered discussion of socio-political issues denied expression by the autocratic military leaders outside the prison walls in the text.

The non-hierarchical nature of this public sphere is indicative of a transformative space where the rights and obligations to nonhumans, to the larger environment, can be given serious consideration. Also worthy of mention is that the open forum discussed women's rights, a marginal subject in the novel. The novel indicates that it is in such space of equality that our superior attitude to marginal subjects – women, the larger environment – can be challenged and transformed towards a realization of the principles of the ecological thought.

If "epistolary writing," according to Janet Gurkin Altman, "refracts events through not one but two prisms – that of reader as well as that of writer," the third person or omniscient narrative point of view of Ojaide's *The Activist* showcases multiple prisms.⁴² Although the novel's title suggests that the novel will be delivered in the

first person's voice of the protagonist, the Activist, the novel comes to us in the third person voice. The narrative point of view is significant because it helps to reduce the emphasis on the Activist and allow us to focus on the different collectivities galvanized for the ecology. As we follow the protagonist throughout the novel, we see that his notable actions in the novel happen in collaboration with others. For instance, he gets fully involved in the community after he marries Ebi, and his bunkering business is in collaboration with Pere. More importantly, his governorship ambition is realized after the masses overwhelmingly vote for him. Put differently, the Activist becomes governor because of the women who embarked on the nude protest and the coalition of the masses that guaranteed his election victory after the demise of the military dictator.

CONCLUSION

While blowing up oil installations and bunkering are subversive acts pointing to the agency of individuals as existing scholarship on these novels indicate, the challenge that this essay undertakes is to put pressure on these otherwise salutary forms of protest by asking how they fit in with the need for ecological sustainability. This reading invites a conversation about the impacts of acts of sabotage on the environment while not losing sight of their critical role in a country where the government tends to understand mainly (if not only) the language of force. While postcolonial studies' emphasis on agency and resistance is important, the ecocritical perspective foregrounded in this essay illuminates the need for ecological appraisal of such strategies and a search for sustainable alternatives.

Given contemporary concerns over global warming, postcolonial studies scholars ought to reassess those actions hitherto hailed for demonstrating the agency of the oppressed so as to accommodate the interests of the environment as well. Clearly, both novels under investigation suggest possible alternatives as seen in the last section. In *Tides*, we see an emphasis on collaboration from the epistolary form and the transformative public sphere. *The Activist*, on the other hand, suggests that the role of the intellectual transcends championing dialogue and overseeing the public sphere like Bickerbug did in prison. The Activist's election as governor recommends the intellectual run for office to steer positive change. Unlike *Tides*, which ends on a less optimistic note with bombed environments, *The Activist* ends hopefully with the intellectual-turned-governor creating a ministry of the environment to address the environmental challenges facing the region, and declaring that "EVERY LIFE MATTERS" at a rally in the United States.⁴³

This quote reads like something literally taken out of Morton's *The Ecological Thought* and deserves to be read in that light. For Morton, "[i]f we think the ecological thought, two things happen. Our perspective becomes very vast. More and more aspects of the Universe become included in the ecological thought."⁴⁴ The words on the Activist's placard definitely demonstrate a vast perspective, both formally and in content. That they are written in uppercase not only places emphasis on the subject they convey; the boldness of the lettering certainly conveys some sense of vastness. And even more so is the content. The qualifier "every" portends an all-inclusive category; no life in the universe is discounted in the passage. Read side by side, these novels buttress the role of the government and civil society in demonstrating the ecological thought in formerly colonized spaces. They also insist that intellectuals

have a critical role to play in the social restructuring of the Delta environment and cannot afford to be missing in the public spheres of progressive conversations about the future of the region. But the larger point these narratives make is this: if the old postcolonialism – emerging from decolonization – sanctioned violence as a means to human liberation and progress, the new postcolonialism – both as a political and intellectual imperative – must be attentive to the needs of both humans and nonhumans in drawing up its *modus operandi*.

ENDNOTES

1. Grant Farred, “A Thriving Postcolonialism: Toward an Anti-Postcolonial Discourse.” *Neplanta: Views from South* 2.2 (2001): 245.
2. *Ibid.*, 245.
3. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 1963), 6.
4. Farred, “A Thriving Postcolonialism,” 245.
5. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan, “Introduction: A Postcolonial Environmental Humanities.” In *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 2.
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CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

RELATING TO AND
THROUGH LAND

An ecology of relations in
Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka*



Kirk B. Sides

Sometimes, by taking up the problems of the Other, it is possible to find oneself.
—Edouard Glissant

I believe that errors of this kind are very many in the book *Chaka*; but I am not very concerned about them because I am not writing history, I am writing a tale.
—Thomas Mofolo

THE POLITICS OF ECOLOGY AND
THE POSTCOLONIAL

The relationship between the camps of postcolonial studies and ecocriticism has been marked by a history of tenuous and often complex and difficult rapprochement. Indeed, the two critical constellations have struggled to find common ground upon which to think critically about *both* postcolonial studies' historically-grounded critique of neo-/colonial nation states *and* the continuing engagement with forms of "green imperialism" and ecological exploitation that continue as part of larger discourses around environmentalism, especially in the postcolonies of the world. Moreover, if we look not only to the aesthetic concerns of postcolonial critical discourse but also to its mechanisms for historiographical reorientation, then perhaps it is not too far-fetched to say that on some foundational level postcolonial criticism/studies is an epistemological retooling of modes of representation; a seminal concern being the quest for and fashioning of sets of imaginative registers for representationally reclaiming the land of (formerly) colonized spaces. As Simon Gikandi writes, "the literary project of decolonization was driven by what one may call a double mimesis: the imperative to question existing colonialist theories of representation and *the desire to inscribe the lived experiences of the colonized*."¹

Environmental and eco-theorist Pablo Mukherjee makes a poignant and compelling claim for the integration of the two fields when he writes that:

Surely, any field purporting to theorise the global conditions of colonialism and imperialism (let us call it postcolonial studies) cannot but consider the complex

interplay of environmental categories such as water, land, energy, habitat, migration with political or cultural categories such as state, society, conflict, literature, theatre, visual arts. Equally, any field purporting to attach interpretive importance to environment (let us call it eco/environmental studies) must be able to trace the social, historical and material co-ordinates of categories such as forest, rivers, bio-regions and species.²

Muhkerjee's claim is compelling precisely because he presents these two epistemological formulations as historically conjoined in both an intuitive and material way. One cannot think the ecological imaginary without the historical reorientation – of texts, and actors – central to the project of postcolonial studies. *Ecology*, which maps the relationships between a given environment and the organisms within it, as well as between these organisms, serves as an important conceptual lens through which to chart the entanglement of postcolonial and ecocritical concerns and paradigms. In this chapter, I argue that the literature of early-twentieth-century Mosotho writer Thomas Mofolo prefigures this entanglement between a politics of postcolonialism and a grounding in the aesthetics of an ecological imaginary, and does so as a way to construct a different narrative of modernity for the South African nation.³ While the state envisioned the modernity of South Africa as buttressed by a platform of segregation – a geo-politics of separation grounded in the *soil* of this place that would later be consolidated under the banner of apartheid – Mofolo's ecological vision locates the basis of historical relationality between southern Africans in the very same landscape. Consequently, Mofolo's imagining of the future is based on a historical relationship to the landscape of southern Africa, and its role as common ground for narratives of encounter, collusion, and mixture between Africans; these are narratives of a southern African ecological modernity grounded in its very soil. As such, this chapter explores Mofolo's vision through a reading of his seminal work, the historical fiction *Chaka* (1925),⁴ characterized as the first African novel, for the ways in which his narrative *thinks* the history of the southern African landscape from an ecological perspective. I argue that not only does the novel work against the racist policies of the South African state, which was increasingly grounding its segregationist platforms in the very *soil* of the nation, but I also posit that Mofolo's vision of a southern African ecology of relations between otherwise segregated Africans can be read as an other and earlier genealogical moment in the history of ecological writing in and on southern Africa – writing that is useful to our contemporary, ecocritical concerns.

The novel *Chaka* is, at least partly, the creative result of Mofolo's travels through "Zululand" in present-day KwaZulu-Natal, coming from his native Lesotho to do what might be characterized as ethnographic field work, performing interviews and compiling information on everything from military customs to folklore and fairytales of the amaZulu. In interviews conducted with the author's son, Mofolo Mofolo, Daniel P. Kunene relates the son's claim that, "the original manuscript contained at least two chapters,⁵ which described in some detail the history and customs of the Zulus, as well as their military systems which had apparently impressed Mofolo highly during his researches in Natal."⁶ The narrative, which self-consciously positions itself in the crucible between the historical and the fictional, is the tale of the eponymous anti-hero Chaka, his birth, his ascent to unprecedented power, and the

cataclysmic effects this had on southern African geo-politics, ending finally in his dramatic death at the hands of his own brothers. Among Mofolo's many authorial flourishes is the question of legitimacy surrounding Chaka's birth, which drives much of the plot and in turn is centered on Chaka's initial alienation from the community and his subsequent quest to regain the ascension to his father's crown. On the surface, Chaka's legitimacy is significant precisely because it sets him on a path towards power upon which he encounters forces which mold and shape him as a character and as a would-be ruler, but which consequently also shape the cultural, racial, and political topography of southern Africa.

But perhaps more importantly for our purposes here, within the novel each of the encounters that move Chaka towards his destiny of unprecedented power also involve a certain engagement with the earth; whether through submersion in water or prostrations in the soil, Chaka's eventual power can be read as a series of submersions/immersions into the ecology of southern Africa. Thus, he represents the world of southern Africa through a distinctly ecological imaginary, one in which future intersections between postcolonial thought and ecocritical concerns are signaled through the land of southern Africa. Beginning with the *difaqane* – rather than colonial encounter or expansion – Mofolo's novel offers a rethinking of the genealogies of modernity in South Africa, which in turn occasions a reformulation of the ecological and its relationship to the formation and representation of collective identities. In other words, a sense of modernity, especially a postcolonial modernity for southern Africa has, for Mofolo, a different point of origin, both genealogically and geographically. *Chaka* reroutes the thinking of modernity through an ecological archive of southern Africa, where engagements on and through the land offer different narratives to the otherwise dominant colonial ones.

Indeed, it is this ecological vision that not only marks Mofolo as a prescient African writer – a quality captured by Gikandi's description of Mofolo's writing as "an early postcolonial style," but it is also Mofolo's notion of modernity as not coming from elsewhere, which allows for the idea that ecological and environmental thinking are not recent phenomena in this context.⁷ Moreover, it suggests that an African ecological imaginary must be thought of as having a *different* genealogy than one serving as a proxy narrative to the imperial exportation of modernity from Europe to the colonial world. For instance, even well meaning critics who advocate for an African instantiation of ecocriticism, while being proponents of "tak[ing] into account the specificity of cultural, discursive, and material contexts in Africa," still subscribe to narratives of the "ways that modernity *has shaped* Africa; and the kinds of *local responses* that have been engendered."⁸ While I am in complete agreement with the fundamental currents of environmental thinking about Africa, such as the proposition that "an African ecocriticism would differentiate itself from ecocriticism in the North . . . to work from an understanding of the complexity of African pasts," I do however take issue with the persistent figuring of Africa as a passive landscape which can only offer "responses to currents of *modernity that reached Africa from Europe* initially, but that *now influence Africa from multiple centers*, European, American, and now Asian."⁹ In order to think a different and longer genealogy to ecological thinking in Africa, a genealogy which in turn maps differently our notions of where and when ideas of modernity have been negotiated, interrogated, and represented, I will argue that Mofolo's *Chaka* is just such an example of early ecological thinking

in Africa. Moreover, the novel narrates its own ideas about what modernity might mean in southern Africa, especially in terms of ecological and environmental concerns that produce – rather than respond to – modernity.

Moreover, while most ecocriticism and environmental studies are largely presentist and even futurist, I want to suggest that there is much to be discovered through a historical approach to these questions in the context of African writing. For instance, Rob Nixon has written recently that

postcolonial studies at its most incisive remains, it seems to me, an invaluable critical presence in an era of resurgent imperialism, an era in which – sometimes through outright, unregulated plunder, sometimes under camouflage of developmental agendas – a neoliberal order has widened, with ruinous environmental repercussions, the gulf between the expanding class of the super-rich and our planet's 3 billion ultra poor.¹⁰

While Nixon's critique is aimed towards a violence spreading out across the future of the "developing" world, I want to direct our attention *back*, to an earlier historical moment at the beginning of the twentieth century in southern Africa, where a confluence of (settler) colonial and imperial forces gave rise to a version of ecological thinking that was invested in undoing violent articulations of racial and ethnic division made through the metrics of racialized landscapes. In this chapter, I argue that Mofolo's ecological vision of southern Africa at the opening of the twentieth century maps a historical subjectivity based on relations between *inhabitants* of this space, rather than the claims of originary purity being staked out by the racist machinations of the South African state, as a result of the colonial formations it emerged from.

Perhaps one of the most formative thinkers of ecocriticism, Ursula Heise, asks "whether it is possible to return to more ecologically attuned ways of inhabiting nature, and what would be the cultural prerequisites for such a change?"¹¹ I argue that Mofolo offers just such an example of a cultural shift towards a more ecologically intimate relationship, not only to nature and geography, but also a more nuanced relation to the geo-political machinations of the nation state. The life-world of *Chaka* is a chiaroscuro of encounters mapping relationships that are more sensitive to the multiple forms of relationality predicated upon the landscape of southern Africa. Indeed, Mofolo is acutely aware that if his novel is to narrate a political shift in the relations between citizens of the state, then it must be predicated on deep historical and ecological connections. In other words, the subjectivity that Mofolo articulates is based on a radically *different relationship to both history and to land, as well as to the history of land in southern Africa*. In turn, Mofolo prefigures and echoes Roland Barthes's call to "always strip down Nature, its 'laws' and its 'limits,' so as to expose History there, and finally to posit Nature as itself historical."¹² *Chaka*, I argue, is an example of such a novelistic treatment of nature, where a refiguring of the ecology of (colonial) space, and the lines of separation projected onto it, is entangled with a project of history. Furthermore, Mofolo's style for representing the ecology of southern Africa as a space of historical relation and collusion resonates with Caribbean theorist Édouard Glissant's claim regarding the islands of the Caribbean basin, that "Our landscape is its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history."¹³ For Mofolo it is impossible to think about a political

reorientation of citizenship, without rethinking not only the historical relationship to land, but also the forms of relation that landscape has precipitated. It is this reorientation that serves as the basis for a newly imagined form of national belonging.

As Glissant writes, “the politics of ecology . . . far from consenting to sacred intolerance, it is a driving force for the relational interdependence of all lands, of the whole Earth.”¹⁴ Indeed, according to this politics of ecology, the landscape itself in Mofolo’s novels becomes the common ground for a relational model of belonging and the basis for a future of southern African (national) citizenship. Based on a reading of *Chaka*, written in 1909–1910, and which chronicles the ascent of the legendary consolidator of the Zulu peoples and the cataclysmic effects of the so-called *difaqane*, or the scattering of tribes of southern Africa at the hand of the eponymous ruler, I argue for a history of ecological thinking in southern African writing much *longer* than is usually accounted for. Moreover, through comparison with other forms of ecologically based discourses of identity and belonging, notably Edouard Glissant, I demonstrate how Mofolo’s vision of southern Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century maps and models forms of subjectivity and citizenship – inflected with the land – that inform our current notions of belonging, both racially and nationally.

THE POLITICS OF UNIFICATION AND ENVIRONMENTS OF SEGREGATION

The years 1909–1910 saw the consolidation of the four colonies of the Cape Colony, forming the Union of South Africa. A newly minted member of the Commonwealth, the Union was nominally subject to the British crown, but would also function according to a provincial parliamentary system. The 1909 South Africa Act proclaims that,

... the Colonies of the Cape of Good Hope, Natal, the Transvaal, and the Orange River Colony, hereinafter called the Colonies, shall be united in a Legislative Union under one Government under the name of the Union of South Africa. On and after the day appointed by such proclamation the Government and Parliament of the Union shall have full power and authority within the limits of the Colonies, but the King may at any time after the proclamation appoint a governor-general for the Union.

The unification of South Africa, being a symbolic coup for the British Crown, was ultimately a racial victory, solidifying a legislative safety valve that would protect white rule in the country. The unique system of provincial administrations meant that in matters of enfranchisement, the cultural and ethnic differences between English- and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans could and would be placed aside in order to present a united racial front against the “African,” “Coloured,” and “Indian” peoples of South Africa. The politics of unification surrounding the Union of South Africa, based on historical projections of (imagined) difference, as well as current and future projects of segregation, must be read with a touch of irony for the ways in which this politics of unity were predicated from the beginning upon historical and geographical separation. More importantly for our purposes here, the unification consolidated and formalized a set of colonial practices already in motion across southern Africa. But also, retrospectively, the Union can be read as a violent victory of racial politics, won

for its ability to simultaneously activate a white constituency across a national body politic while in the same measure splintering possibilities for any such non-white coalitions. These politics of unification set in motion 80 years of national politics based on two key mythologies related to the *land* of South Africa: the first was a project of racialization of the landscape based on narratives developed through state projects of anthropology and under the aegis of the Native Affairs department, which sought to fix the relationship of certain groups of people – whether classified racially or ethnically – to a specific territory. The second, and related, element was a projection of these mythologies of racial(-ized) landscapes back into the historical archive of southern Africa, and thereby creating an imagined precedence for a political economy of contemporary segregation in the twentieth century.

Meanwhile, a 1912 retrospective chronicle published by the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society of Lesotho notes that Thomas Mofolo had submitted a manuscript, a historical fiction about the history of the Zulu peoples and the ascension of the legendary King Shaka, which the author had written during the same years of the unification, 1909–1910. Even though the Mission Press had indeed published Mofolo's earlier works, the submission of this manuscript – which would become the novel *Chaka* – began a censorial standoff lasting nearly 15 years, until the novel was published in its original Sesotho in 1925.¹⁵ While *Chaka* returns to the birth and life of the legendary nineteenth-century consolidator and ruler of the Zulu empire, Chaka, I argue that the text's historical vision – of South Africa and its geographies at the beginning of the nineteenth century – imagines a model of national formation different from the segregationist politics of the author's own moment. I have suggested elsewhere that the reason for the delayed publication of the manuscript has to do in part with the unorthodox imagining of national formation in this moment. Note how Glissant writes of Mofolo:

The epic of the Zulu Emperor Chaka, as related by Thomas Mofolo, seems to me to exemplify an African poetics. . . . It is an epic that, while enacting the “universal” themes of passion and man's destiny, is not concerned with the *origin* of a people or its early history. Such an epic does not include a creation myth. On the contrary, it is related to a much more dangerous moment in the experience of the people concerned, that of its forthcoming contact.¹⁶

Mofolo's vision of southern Africa, its peoples but also its geographies – rather than a historical topography of difference and division – is also resonant with Glissant's notion of Relation. Glissant notes that in the articulation of a “national literature,” which happens when a community “tries to put together reasons for its existence,” that in this literature of national formation, the “landscape . . . stops being merely decorative or supportive and emerges as a full character. Describing the landscape is not enough. The individual, the community, and the land are inextricable in the process of creating history.”¹⁷

Moreover, I want to think about Mofolo's imagining of southern Africa's historical entanglements as part of what Glissant calls an “ecological vision of Relation.”¹⁸ In opposition to “root identity” – which is founded upon a “myth of the creation of the world” – Glissant writes that relation identity “does not think of a land as a territory from which to project toward other territories but as a place where one

gives-on-and-with [*donner-avec*]” and also that, “Relation identity exults the thought of errantry and of totality.”¹⁹ I posit that not only does the historical geography of southern Africa function in *Chaka* as the common ground of relationality between and amongst groups otherwise and increasingly being delineated by the South African state in Mofolo’s time, but also that the author’s own act of narrative creation models a southern African subjectivity transgressive of such segregationist state boundaries being erected. If the life-world of the novel opens “in the olden days when the people were still settled upon the land [and] the nations were living in peace, each one in its own original territory . . .” then such Acadian, idyllic tranquility is removed from the text’s ontology, to the time of creation mythology when “Nkulunkulu, the Great-Great One, caused the people to emerge from a bed of reeds.”²⁰ Mofolo’s tale is about a time that *follows* upon that time. When the *difaqane* occasioned a massive shift in the demographical – as well as cultural, ethnic, and political – makeup of southern Africa, *Chaka* returns to this moment in order to interrogate the narrative of (national) modernity being written in Mofolo’s own time. Mofolo’s imagining of modernity in southern Africa is neither a proxy narrative for European contact, nor is it a re-inscription of the lines of segregation upon which the South African state in the early twentieth century was drawing its own maps of national modernity.

The moment of national consolidation in South Africa, encapsulated by the 1909 South Africa Act, laid the foundation for nearly a century of continuing segregationist politics as the basis for a sense of national modernity. For example, by 1950, Theophilus Ebenhaezer Dönges, then Minister of the Interior for South Africa, could introduce the now infamous Population Registration Act with an explicit declaration that “The determination of a person’s race is of the greatest importance in the enforcement of any existing or future laws in connection with separate residential areas.”²¹ Upon ratification of the act, it was incumbent upon the South African government, now two years into National Party leadership, to determine and maintain a *connection between race and land*. According to the preamble as well as the legislation itself, race would be the determinate, and explicit, index for nation formation as well as what form the nation would take.

It was on the heels of this foundational piece of legislation that the Group Areas Act (1950) provided for the comprehensive segregation by color of all commercial and residential arrangements at every level of society, from urban centers to remote villages. Dönges validates the segregationist logic of the Group Areas Act with a predictably moralistic rhetoric, suggesting that it was now incumbent upon the state to reduce racial conflict, otherwise assumed to be a natural occurrence of racial encounter. The Minister states that the Group Areas Act was:

designed to eliminate friction between the races in the Union because we believe, and *believe strongly that points of contact – all unnecessary points of contact – between the races must be avoided*. If you reduce the number of points of contact to the minimum, you reduce the possibility of friction. Contact brings about friction, and friction brings about heat, and may cause a conflagration.²²

Wrapped in a mechanical metaphor smacking of apartheid’s desperate attempts to inculcate itself into a global imaginary of modernity and progress, Dönges’ statement also belies the regime’s anxiety around the fundamental question of potential

race contact and the potentially more dangerous notion of race mixture. Apartheid, through a legal program of segregation and an intellectual project of historical delineation of races, would systematically deny the potential for social, cultural, and especially racial interactions, as these intimacies were thought to be antithetical to the future of a strong national formation.

Dönges' statements also belie the first of two foundational impulses of apartheid: the first orienting principle is clear in the Minster's address, which focuses on curtailing all present and future interracial contact. South Africa, in the imagination of its early, segregationist, and apartheid architects would be a nation founded upon division, not only of its people, *but also of the land upon which those people lived*. The second principle entailed a project of myth-making by which (racial) difference would also be projected back into the past. In order to create a "modern" nation based on present and future separateness, the history of South Africa would also be a history of difference and separation. Speaking broadly about colonialism's historical imagination, Frantz Fanon writes that,

The claim to a national culture in the past does not only rehabilitate that nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture. In the sphere of psycho-affective equilibrium it is responsible for an important change in the native. Perhaps we haven't sufficiently demonstrated that colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.²³

It is clear how apartheid's vision of modernity was based upon and justified by this mythology of a racially delineated past, which it in turn exercised through a project of investing the land with these mythologies of delineation, based on a racialization.

The speeches of apartheid politicians, such as Dönges as well as Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd – National Party Prime Minister and popularly known as the "architect of apartheid" – ensured that apartheid's vision of the future was a racist modernity grounded in various orienting rhetorical "logics." For instance, while Dönges relies on mechanical "friction," Verwoerd couches Separate Development in an image of eco-logical division. On May 7th, 1957, Verwoerd, then South African Minister of Native Affairs, delivered a speech entitled "Separate Development: The Positive Side,"²⁴ to commemorate the opening of the Transkei Territorial Authority. Verwoerd's speech marks a number of monumental shifts in the development of both segregationist policies in South Africa, as well as the larger "grand apartheid" vision of a southern Africa nation-state grid of autonomous racial homelands. The speech marks an inaugural shift in the life of apartheid, expressing the ideological as well as practical parts of Verwoerd's version of segregation – "separate development" – articulated here in distinction to many of his predecessors (most notably D.F. Malan and J.G. Strijdom) who advocated for a much more virulent and a raw variety of white racism. Verwoerd's "separate but equal" platform, symbolized in this speech by the figure of the "fruit bearing tree" of separate development, not only consciously continued to mark a distinction between apartheid segregationist rhetoric and the racism of German National Socialism (a charge continually leveled against the National Party from the 1930s onwards), it also thereby placed apartheid discourse in line with the

segregationist – “separate but equal” – platforms of the United States.²⁵ Verwoerd imagines South Africa’s racial modernity at this moment as an agricultural contract between white and black; *a patronizing ecological patronage system of racial and ethnic delineation to be grounded in the very soil of the nation.*

MOFOLO’S CHAKA AND AN ECOLOGICAL IMAGINARY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

To return to Mofolo’s *Chaka*, it is a short novel describing both the birth and life of the nineteenth-century consolidator of the Zulu peoples and their cultural customs in particular, as well as the nineteenth-century southern African demographic tectonics that precipitated this group’s coalescence more generally. The novel is the imaginative result of Mofolo’s travels through KwaZulu during the time of the Bambatta Rebellion, taking ethnographical field notes on the customs and folklore of the amaZulu. Generically, the novel employs Shakespearean drama, African oral epic form, as well as a curious blend of anthropological account and mythological storytelling to conjure up a legend existing within the southern African imaginary, one that Mofolo then retools in order to think otherwise than the nationalist and segregationist formulations of his own moment. In other words, in response to the reifying, classificatory, and segregating schemes of the pre-apartheid imaginary, Mofolo’s *Chaka* poses something of a historical recuperation. However, what is recuperated is a southern African history of differences, encounters between these differences, even their entanglements, but rarely their reconciliation.²⁶ When interviewed about his writing of *Chaka*, Mofolo reveals how he uses the literary to complicate the historical, infusing it with the mythic, but also undoing history’s epistemological pillars of truth telling in exchange for a more productively opaque narrative style. Mofolo explains that:

I believe that errors of this kind are very many in the book *Chaka*; but I am not very concerned about them because I am not writing history, I am writing a tale, or I should say I am writing what actually happened, but to which a great deal has been added, and from which a great deal has been removed, so that much has been left out, and much has been written that did not actually happen, with the aim solely of fulfilling my purpose in writing this book.²⁷

Mofolo’s peripatetic description of his text prefigures the itinerant traveler we witness traversing the landscape of southern African in the first pages of the *Chaka* text, a figure whose movements across the geography of southern Africa map an imaginary of historical entanglement, mixture, opacity, and relationality. In so doing, Mofolo models a different model of national becoming based on a shared “ecological vision of relation.”

In Mofolo’s resuscitation of the history as well as the legend of Chaka and the character’s cultural, ethnic, and political consolidation of many of the peoples of southern Africa, the novel invests in an aesthetic economy of the landscape. Thinking through the ecology of the novel’s setting, Mofolo imagines a southern African life-world where the histories of political upheaval, demographical shifts, and the collusions of various peoples are an effect of inhabitants’ *relationship to the soil* upon

which they meet. Mofolo rethinks the history of ethnic and national consolidation, not as a point of origin, but rather as point of contact and mixture imagined through the land. The novel is the story of the life, ascension to ruler of the Zulu kingdom, and eventual death of Chaka, told against and through the landscape of southern Africa, imagined by Mofolo as an ecosystem productive of relations across otherwise delineated groups of people. Indeed, from opening to close, the story of Chaka is imagined and related through the particular ecological nature of its setting. After much cartographical description of southern Africa (discussed below) in the opening pages, Mofolo's writing remains attentive to the role played by the landscape, and offers a survey of how the variegations of the geography map a particular texture of the novel. Existing somewhere between the novelist and the storyteller, Mofolo's unique style means that the reader follows his tale, of Chaka's birth, his exile, and eventual rule, and even his death, as it traverses the landscape of southern Africa, locating this historical tale in the deep ecological specificity of its setting. While I will discuss the idea of an ecological imaginary in more detail below, I want to initially put forward the idea that, in Mofolo's telling, in fact *Chaka* could not be imagined without the material and symbolic economy rendered through the ecology of the place. Indeed, Mofolo's feat as a writer is that in rereading this novel, it becomes nearly impossible to imagine a modern South Africa that isn't predicated upon various ecosystems of relation, collusion, and mixture.

We enter the diegetic frame of *Chaka* through what I am calling a cartographical perspective, an aerial frame that maps the geographical contours of southern Africa. It is within this map(-ping) that we first encounter Mofolo's curious itinerant traveler who embodies Mofolo's own ideology behind the writing of the novel. The novel begins with these lines:

South Africa is a large headland situated between two oceans, one to the east and one to the west.²⁸ The nations that inhabit it are numerous and greatly varied in custom and language. Yet they easily divide themselves into three large groups: the nations settled along the western Seaboard are of a yellow complexion. They are the San and the Khoi. The ones in the centre are the Batswana and the Basotho. Those to the east are the Bakone or the Matebele. The boundaries between them are prominent and visible; they are the boundaries created by God, not by man. . . . These nations are markedly distinct from each other, so much so that *a person travelling from the west to the east* is immediately conscious of coming into a different country and among a strange people when he arrives among the Sotho nations in the centre, and likewise when he descends towards the Matebele nations over there beyond the Maloti mountains.²⁹

Such a textual framing would initially seem to reinforce, if even implicitly, the cartographical imperatives of the nascent and segregationist South African state. Indeed, this passage does seem to initially re-inscribe the racial and ethnic divisions foundational to the South African state, making them appear environmentally inherent to the geography of the space itself. However, if we focus on the narrative persona of this frame, this "person travelling from west to east" and the ways this traveler stages acts of geographical transversal – indeed, as the opening action of the novel we witness movements across different life-worlds – then perhaps we can read the novel

as setting up a more complex cartographical relationship to the landscape of South Africa, one predicated on relationality.

I believe that this peripatetic style, figured both in Mofolo's own creative self-description, as well as the "traveller" across the landscape of the text, enacts what Glissant calls a form of "errantry." This is not simply to say that Mofolo privileges a form of wandering, but rather that his text embodies the ethics of errantry that Glissant has also described.³⁰ Both Mofolo – as a self-reflexive writer – as well as his novel demonstrate the ways in which "the thought of errantry is also the thought of what is relative. . . . The thought of errantry is a poetics . . . the tale of errantry is the tale of Relation."³¹ In the transversal of southern African space, there is the production of a poetics for representing that landscape. A seemingly simple formulation, there is an ideological imperative in Mofolo's method that stands askance to the state strictures of the moment, which were increasingly inhibiting such movements, relations, and representations across southern Africa.

As the nameless traveler of the opening paragraph traverses the landscape of southern Africa, with each passing boundary of the landscape witnessing "nations [that] are markedly distinct," we come to read the ways in which Mofolo has written a novel that is at once about both difference and recognition; indeed, it is in the tension between what one expects to find and what is actually encountered (as the reader follows the traveler across the landscape of South Africa) that lies the ecological politics of this novel. For example, this itinerant reading practice precipitated by Mofolo's style is also resonant with Glissant's distinction between "circular nomadism" and "arrowlike nomadism."³² "Circular nomadism," Glissant tells us, is a form of "errantry" which "silently emerges from the destructuring of compact national identities that yesterday were still triumphant." Moreover, this errant "search for the Other" is a "poetics . . . the tale of Relation."³³ Mofolo's "discovery" of South Africa stages a form of circular nomadism at the heart of which is the search for the Other, or, rather, textual and creative "detours that lead away from anything totalitarian."³⁴ Reading across and traveling through the (historical) landscapes of South Africa stages a recognition of relationality based upon a shared experience of the ecologies of this place, and leading to what Neil Lazarus describes as the novel's encapsulation of the "psycho-dynamics of . . . land-based experience."³⁵

However, this so-called psycho-dynamics are, indeed, not meant to be clear. Mofolo writes the experience of location through a series of placements and displacements, meant to exist in tension with one another, and thereby push against the state structures of imposed topographical clarity when it came to the delineation of peoples and their supposed ethnic and racial home(-lands). While I mostly agree with Lazarus's claims that "the opening of Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* is exemplary, inasmuch as it does not simply set the scene and place the plot into motion, but serves rather to introduce us to a whole symbolic economy – or 'structure of feeling,'"³⁶ I argue that neither the economy nor the structure is necessarily a clearly delineated one. In other words, in the textual excavation of the soil composing the place of this novel we are not meant to find clarity, but rather a relational opacity. For instance, the passage following the aerial frame above is just such an excavation:

The greater portion of the land of the Bokone, which lies between the Maloti and the sea, is covered by forest. Besides, the crops there are never bitten by frost, for

there are only light frosts because of the nearness of the sea. It is a land of lush greenness, and of extremely rich pasturage. Its soil is dark, and that means that it produces much food; its indigenous grass is the luxuriant *seboku*; its water lies in the marshes, and that means that its cattle grow very fat. There are numerous rivers, and that means that rain is plentiful. It is a land of dense mists which often clear only after the sun has risen high, and that means that there are no droughts since the moisture takes long to dry up.³⁷

I argue that the passage above is impactful precisely because we are meant to understand – and intuitively so – that this ecological intuition is predicated upon an unknown space – both to the author and the reader – a space we have just been aeri-ally telescoped into. Moreover, what Mofolo so trenchantly accomplishes with this passage is both the production of an ecological imagination based on an environment that is (geographically, culturally, etc.) not his own, but also if this in an ordering of a life-world, then it actually succeeds in creating an order of things that further obfus-cates any presumably neat relationships between spaces and the meanings they are meant to inhere, (racial) meanings increasingly being projected upon South African space by the state. The “logical” of this eco-logical system is not necessarily clearly delineated in the Western, Cartesian sense. Mofolo’s tableau of southern Africa maps an ecological order that predicates relations between and across the taxonomical boundaries of the ruling order.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin describe how

Ecology . . . tends to function more as aesthetics than as *methodology* in eco/ environmental criticism, providing the literary-minded critic with a storehouse of individual and collective metaphors through which the socially transformative workings of the “environmental imagination” can be mobilised and performed.³⁸

In this way, and with a mythopoetic orientation to the aesthetic nature of the environ-ment, Mofolo’s is an ecology which breaks down the logical, the rational, the order-ing, the governing; reaches across the lines of the racial/ethnic order to find meaning on the other side. Likewise, Deloughrey and Handley note how,

This legacy of capturing and renaming nature leaves the postcolonial writer in the position of having to renegotiate the terms of taxonomy, struggling to articulate new relationships and new meanings in the tired language of empire. . . . This self-conscious process of renaming and revisioning is a subversion of the colonial language of taxonomy, discipline and control, and a key element in postcolonial literary production.³⁹

The eco-logical order of *Chaka* is not only a critique of the order of governance that divides space and the relations between these spaces, but Mofolo’s ecology, as Glissant argues, if it is extended beyond “mankind’s drive to extend to the planet Earth the former sacred thought of Territory,” then this ecology “will bear the germ of criticism of territorial thought [of its sacredness and exclusiveness], so that ecology will then act as a politics.”⁴⁰ Indeed, in *Chaka* we find what may be one of the first examples of an early postcolonial literary politics, precisely because of a characteristic sense of

reinvestment in and reimagining of the epistemological conditions for the representations of the ecologies of colonial space. As such, we find in Mofolo's "ordering" that things are not so very ordered – despite, or because of – the incessant language to the contrary. Indeed, in this ecology of relations we find that the categorical messiness is the political gesture.

Two further passages help to convey the ways in which the textual life-world of *Chaka* imagines its composite environments and the ecological intimacies impacting the formation of its characters, and in particular its hero-villain Chaka. As a function of Chaka's alienation, as well as his quest for his father's throne, his mother seeks medicinal salves for her son's ostracized and even exiled position vis-à-vis the community. In addition to a treatment with traditional herbal remedies, Chaka's otherness is ritualized in the text through his monthly practice of bathing alone in a particularly isolated pool of the Mfalozi-Mhlope River. Each month, on a day appointed by the traditional healer employed by his mother Nandi, Chaka returns to this same bathing spot in the river, a particularly ominous section described as "an ugly place . . . a frightening stretch of water, dark green in color and very deep. In this pool the water was pitch dark, intensely black."⁴¹ On one particular morning, as the community was still sleeping, and as Chaka was bathing according to his prescribed custom, "a warm wind began to blow. . . . The reeds on the banks of the river swayed violently . . . and shook in a mad frenzy."⁴² It seems the very nature of Chaka's bathing place – a space symbolizing not only the cleansing of a history of illegitimacy but also of empowerment towards his eventual rule – this ecosystem is shaken to its very core as a portentous sign of Chaka's meeting with the "King of the Deep Pool," a giant serpent whose presence was not only foretold to Chaka by his doctor, but whose appearance marks the first time Chaka is assured of his eventual ascension to unprecedented power.

As Chaka stands in the water of the pool, confronting the great serpent, he has come face to face with something of a symbolic representative of the environment which he will eventually rule over:

They stared at each other, the snake in its own abode and the man come there to provoke it. They stared at each other in that manner with Chaka's hand refusing to leave the tuft of hair where the strong medicine was.⁴³

Chaka must confront this manifestation of the land where he will one day be king and hold sway. It is clear that this is also something of a trespass onto the "abode" of the great serpent, and as such it suggests that Chaka's meeting with him is something of a test, but also a moment in which the landscape offers a strange form of blessing on Chaka's rule. After the snake has anointed Chaka with its tongues, and again a wind rises, a thick mist covers the whole scene and from the reed banks of the river a "heavy, stentorious voice" is heard chanting, "Mphu-mphu, hail! / Kalamajweng, Kalamajweng! . . ." and then a softer voice, still from the reeds proceeds, "Hail! Hail! This land is yours, child of my compatriot, / You shall rule over nations and their kings / You shall rule over peoples of diverse traditions."⁴⁴ In this scene, Mofolo displays the importance of the environment in the imagining of this historical tale. It seems that one does not come to understand the significance of Chaka's reign without first witnessing his submersion into the great pool, and symbolically *his submission to the*

rules governing the life-world of this ecological system. The voice heralding Chaka's coming rule does not even come from the serpent himself, but rather, it seems, from the very mists and reeds in which Chaka has taken refuge. Mofolo writes the land as calling in some ways for the tectonic shifts in the geo-political order written across its surface and bringing together a collusion of various and different "peoples of diverse traditions." As the serpent recedes into the pool and the voices dissipate,

the mist opened up and moved away from him, but it did not go back into the water from where it had come, but simply vanished and was no longer there; *but more accurately we might say it seeped into his [Chaka] body.*⁴⁵

At a later moment in the quest to gain his father's throne, Chaka follows Isanusi to the grave of his own father, Senzagakhona. Isanusi is Chaka's second doctor, who comes to him on the latter's exilic journeys across southern Africa and promises Chaka unprecedented and unbridled power over this land. After he works on Chaka with medicines, Isanusi

dug a little on Senzagakhona's grave, and made a hollow which was not too deep, and he cradled himself in it and then began to speak in a language which Chaka did not understand . . . and as he spoke the mound over the grave began to shake and tremble.⁴⁶

Not just references to traditional *muthi* medicinal practices and ancestor veneration, Isanusi's actions are grounded by a profound investment in the very soil where Chaka's father lies. Through a physical proximity to, even an intimacy with, the earth, Isanusi transmits messages through Senzagakhona to Chaka's ancestors. Strangely, and perhaps to the point about the relationality across groups, Isanusi's communication with Chaka's ancestors is in a language foreign to Chaka. While the doctor communicates with the ancestors through the grave, his servant Malunga "stabbed the ground often with Chaka's spear" and upon retrieving it from the earth each time he would point "its sharp edge westwards, then northwards, then southwards, until he had finished all the four points of the earth. When he finished, he plunged that spear of Chaka's into the soil of his father's grave."⁴⁷ While Malunga symbolically offers a performative and prophetic mapping of Chaka's reign, indeed excavating the power and authority from the soil of the father's grave, Isanusi holds court with a host of ancestors through Senzagakhona's grave who, again to Chaka's surprise, speak in a foreign tongue. "Rising from under the depths of the soil, out of the grave," Chaka hears the voices of both his father but also the names of "great-great ancestors" in this communiqué.⁴⁸

The result of this transaction with the soil of Senzagakhona's grave is that Chaka receives his father's as well as his ancestors' blessing to rule, to "be a *man*; be a king," as Senzagakhona puts it. Sanctioned over the very earth where his ancestors lie, Chaka's kingship is at this moment solidified, and as he returns from the grave in the early hours of dawn, the very earth itself seems to offer a supportive exhale to Chaka's kingship: "The wind had died down, and it was perfectly still, *as if all creation were paying homage to that moment when Chaka was returning from his father's grave.*"⁴⁹ In Mofolo's rendering it is not only the sanctity of the ancestor relationship that must

be activated in the assumption of kingship and nation formation in the case of Chaka and the creation of the Zulu peoples, but it is also a profound engagement with the very environment to be ruled in the future. If Chaka's reign is to be catalyst for a seismic shift in the geo-political tectonics of southern Africa, a dramatic break from the early mythopoetical moments of the novel's opening, "in the early days, when the people were still settled upon the land," then this break – which brings together different peoples from across southern African – is in some ways imagined through multiple transactions with the ecology of the novel's setting.

CONCLUSION: THE UNTIMELY NARRATIVES OF THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AND THE STORYTELLER

Achille Mbembe, in his piece "African Modes of Self-Writing," displaces the paradigm of essentialism animating criticism of and on Africa by writing:

Against the arguments of critics who have equated identity with race and geography, I show how current African imaginations of the self are born out of disparate but often intersecting practices, the goal of which is not only to settle factual and moral disputes about the world but also to open the way for *self-styling*. By emphasizing historical contingency and the process of subject formation my aim is to reinterpret subjectivity as time.⁵⁰

Characteristic of his other scholarship, in this piece Mbembe garners a sense of identity untethered to the categories of either place or epistemology. I read his "*self-styling*" as a mode of storytelling that frees the subject from the restrictions of static place-based race, and even of aesthetic form in the articulation of identity. I want to conclude by positing that Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* is an example of this self-styling, one that employs a distinct ecological vision – of relationships between southern African lands and peoples – as a means to interrogate the categorical and cartographical violence of national formation. Mofolo's self-styling forces the reader to abandon assumptions about both racial/ethnic memory and solidarities as well as about what kind of text is best suited for such upheavals of identification. Writing on the cusp of negotiations over how the "modern" South African nation would be formed, Mofolo uniquely positions himself vis-à-vis this process by creating a form of writing that transgresses both formal and racial – one might even say epistemological – boundaries, and continues to stand askance to both national genealogies as well as literary canons.

While DeLoughrey and Handley write that an "ecological approach to literature by definition is not restricted to geopolitical, language, and nationality,"⁵¹ I have argued that as a project of historical excavation of southern African landscapes productive of the entanglement of difference, Mofolo's texts also work directly against such categorical delineations of peoples and of racialized demarcations of land. As such, if *Chaka* inaugurates anything it is a call from the beginning of the twentieth century, directed towards the start of the following century, to reread the history of African literature as a story not of something else, not an allegorical relief of the West's march towards modernity, but as an imagining of an *African* modernity itself; one in which a southern African ecological imaginary is the site of

both relationality and entanglement driving the historical movement of a modern South Africa. Within this call, Mofolo outlines a relationship between literary style and the state, between national consciousness and the aesthetics for representing it through the land.

In closing, I want to return briefly to Mofolo's own explicit and peripatetic self-styling; a style that mirrors the steps of the itinerant "traveler" who we meet traversing the landscape of southern African in the first pages of the *Chaka* text. Again, the author states: "I believe that errors of this kind are very many in the book *Chaka*; but I am not concerned about them because *I am not writing history, I am writing a tale.*"⁵² Mofolo's description of his work reveals a savvy assessment of his historical moment and the chosen "voices" his text speaks through in order to articulate a version of African subjectivity that registers the multiple and often contradictory valences of the otherwise hemmed in and colonized African voice. Through a textual creolization of these registers, Mofolo gives amplitude to an African voice that is at once object and subject of the anthropological imagination, and does so by writing one of the first modern African novels through a mode of storytelling that evokes the epic form. Based on this mingling of styles and registers, I argue that Mofolo, in order to plant the seeds of an anticolonial national consciousness based in the very landscape of the national space, needed the histrionics embedded in the infrastructures of the novel form, while simultaneously allowing the genre of epic to haunt his text in ways that draw attention away from (national) origin stories. Instead of origin narratives, Mofolo tells his "tale" under the signs of quest and of contact. In order to push against history, especially histories of racial and national consolidation, Mofolo's storyteller crosses boundaries and is allowed to *speak from everywhere and nowhere at once*, creating a unique relationship of history (telling) to place.

Mofolo's "tale" speaks of and from another historical moment, offering an untimely critique of the vicissitudes of the South African nation. In turn this narrative register is attentive to the ways in which, as DeLoughrey and Handley write, "place encodes time, suggesting that histories embedded in the land and sea have always provided vital and dynamic methodologies for understanding the transformative impact of empire and the anticolonial epistemologies it tries to suppress."⁵³ A historical ethnography produced from the author's fieldwork, which is also self-described as "not writing history," Mofolo's *Chaka* forces its reader out of the comfort of the known; categories of knowledge, narratives of identity, all become entangled in Mofolo's telling, destabilizing the category of the modern by speaking from both inside and outside of it. As the novel closes in a climactic moment of fratricide, where Chaka prophesizes the coming of white, European imperialism over the land of southern Africa, we are told how "the Zulus, when they think how they were once a strong nation . . . they say: 'They ferment, they curdle! Even great pools dry away!'"⁵⁴

Ultimately, Mofolo's version of history predicates a different imagination of southern African geography. Rather than the segregationist and apartheid historiography of a nation divided along the lines of mythic and essentialist originary differences and delineation, Mofolo's return to southern African history offers a new relationship to this space; *Chaka* imagines an ecology of relations between and amongst the inhabitants of southern Africa as the basis of a modern South African nation, as well as

for the modernity of the South African nation. If we reread *Chaka* in this way, with an eye for how the text's topographies are predicative of relations between southern Africans, then no longer is the ecological history of South Africa solely one of division, no longer does the very soil of the country speak a language of segregation. Rather, what emerges is precisely this ecology of relations, where the "logic" of the landscape is imagined less as a grid of classificatory divisions and more as *an ecosystem of connections*. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Mofolo imagined a different history of South Africa, and in doing so, offers another ground, a common one, for thinking about the future of this place.

ENDNOTES

1. Simon Gikandi, "Realism, Romance, and the Problem of African Literary History." *Modern Language Quarterly* 73.3 (2012): 310; emphasis mine.
2. Pablo Mukherjee, "Surfing the Second Waves: Amitav Ghosh's Tide Country." *New Formations* 59 (2006): 144.
3. Key to understanding Mofolo's conception of modernity is a recognition that, for him, a southern African modernity was not a callow copy of an original produced elsewhere, but rather negotiated on and through the very land of this region.
4. Though not published by the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society's press at Morija, Lesotho, until 1925, Mofolo had indeed written the manuscript for *Chaka* during 1909–1910.
5. Despite the archival research of many, including myself, these chapters have never been located or published.
6. Daniel P. Kunene, "Introduction" to Thomas Mofolo, *Chaka*. Trans. Daniel P. Kunene (Essex: Heinemann African Writers Series, 1981), xii.
7. Gikandi, "Realism, Romance," 324.
8. Byron Carminero-Santangelo and Garth Meyers, eds., *Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press 2011), 8; emphasis mine.
9. Anthony Vital, "Towards an African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology, and Life & Times of Michael K." *Research in African Literatures* 39.1 (2008): 88; emphasis mine.
10. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 37.
11. Ursula K. Heise, "A Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism." *PMLA* 121.2 (2006): 504.
12. Quoted in *ibid.*, 504.
13. Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia 1989), 11.
14. Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1997), 146.
15. *Chaka* was later, in 1931, translated into English by F.H. Dutton. Subsequently, in 1946 its French translation made a rather large impact across the Francophone African and Diaspora worlds, most notably by Leopold S. Senghor's rendering of the Chaka story into poetic verse, which imagined the revolutionary and anticolonial potential of the Chaka figure. See Senghor, *Ethiopiques: Poems* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1963).
16. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 134.
17. *Ibid.*, 105.
18. Glissant, *Poetics*, 146.
19. *Ibid.*, 143–144.
20. Mofolo, *Chaka*, 4.
21. Quoted in David Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 54.

22. Ibid., 54; emphasis added.
23. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 210.
24. Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd, *Separate Development: The Positive Side* (Pretoria: Information Service, Department of Native Affairs, 1958).
25. See, for instance, Saul Dubow's *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). Also, Hermann Giliomee's *The Afrikaners*, and "The Making of the Apartheid Plan, 1929–1948." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29.2 (2003): 373–392. The latter offers a slightly more apologetic version of this relationship.
26. See Sarah Nuttall's use of "entanglement" in her eponymously titled book: "Entanglement is a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if resisted, or ignored or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies human foldedness" (Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement* [Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009], 1).
27. Mofolo in Kunene, "Introduction," xv.
28. Perhaps it will be noted that in Sarah Nuttall's above quoted assessment was a very similar ascription of southern African geography – "its tri-centric location between the Indian and Atlantic worlds as well as the land mass of the African interior" – that was predisposing of creolization.
29. Mofolo, *Chaka*, 1; emphasis mine.
30. Glissant writes that through errantry, "Sometimes, by taking up the problems of the Other, it is possible to find oneself." Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 18.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 19.
33. Ibid., 18–19.
34. Ibid., 18.
35. Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 57.
36. Ibid.
37. Mofolo, *Chaka*, 1–2.
38. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals and the Environment* (London: Routledge 2010), 13.
39. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley, *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literature and the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press 2011), 11.
40. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 146.
41. Mofolo, *Chaka*, 21.
42. Ibid., 22.
43. Ibid., 23.
44. Ibid., 24.
45. Ibid., 25; emphasis mine.
46. Ibid., 81.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., 83; emphasis mine.
50. Achille Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing." *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002): 242.
51. DeLoughrey and Handley, *Postcolonial Ecologies*, 10.
52. Mofolo in Kunene, "Introduction," xv; emphasis mine.
53. DeLoughrey and Handley, *Postcolonial Ecologies*, 4.
54. Mofolo, *Chaka*, 168.

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PART VIII

POSTCOLONIALISM VERSUS
NEOLIBERALISM



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CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

UNLOCKING HISTORY

Postcolonial ethics and the critique of neoliberalism



Filippo Menozzi

... we have to think again about the sources of that which is not corporate; of those practices, experiences, meanings, values which are not part of the effective dominant culture. We can express this in two ways. There is clearly something that we can call alternative to the effective dominant culture, and there is something else that we can call oppositional, in a true sense.

(Williams 40)

During the past thirty years, postcolonial studies have been attacked for being the mystification of a new phase of capitalist development.¹ In this essay, I aim to suggest that the postcolonial debate should not be reduced to being a fetish, the concealment of a new phase of economic exploitation. Discourses about the postcolonial, indeed, are deeply connected with the living traditions of thinking and struggling for a world free from injustice and oppression. Most importantly, *there are* perspectives within postcolonial theory that emphasize the importance of class analysis and the concrete problematic of imperialism and capital accumulation on a world scale. Whereas the word “postcolonial” does not offer a substitute or a supplement to real struggles against the capitalist world system, this controversial concept can evoke a sense of historicity able to challenge the – deterministic and presentist – idea that neoliberal globalization is the only possible world. This essay will first explore some interventions in the field of postcolonial studies that clearly identify the problem of world economic exploitation and argue for a reconnection between postcolonialism and Marxism. Then, my introduction will raise the question of how postcolonial discourse can contribute to really-existing struggles against the current stage of capital accumulation, neoliberalism. The main part of my reflections will be devoted to a reading of Gayatri Spivak’s recent work on an aesthetic education, especially her engagement with Marx and the need for highlighting the ethical impulse of socialism. The essay will conclude by suggesting a link between Spivak’s remarks on ethics and the possibility of constructing a different history. The idea of the postcolonial, indeed, can identify the dialectics of concrete political opposition and the prospect of constructing alternatives to all that is the case.

Following Crystal Bartolovich's crucial advocacy of "a strong and visible *Marxist* postcolonial studies" (Bartolovich 1), the postcolonial question should not prevent, but rather encourage an engagement with what Samir Amin described, in *Imperialism and Unequal Development*, as "world vision of the class struggle, which implies unequal exchange" (106). The task, as Neil Lazarus has compellingly demonstrated, is to "reconstruct" a sense of the postcolonial that may help the struggle against capitalism instead of simply adapting to the status quo (Lazarus, *Postcolonial Unconscious*, 1). The prevalent academic, nominalist attacks on the word "postcolonial" do not seem to be a very productive contribution to changing the world. If anything, this controversial term should be rescued from being a mere ideological sanction of the world as it is. Instead of descriptive category or textual mystification, the postcolonial should become a tool useful to already existing struggles and resistances against accumulation by dispossession.

For this reason, a first understanding of the term should imply a critique of the present, in the form of historical consciousness able to challenge the idea that neo-liberal doctrines are the only viable way of dealing with the crisis of capitalism. Marxist trends in postcolonial discourse are informed by the awareness that history is something that is actively made and changed by the people, rather than already pre-determined by hegemonic structures of domination. Important authors such as Neil Lazarus, Frederick Cooper, and Ann Laura Stoler have advocated, from different viewpoints, such historical materialist understanding the postcolonial. While Cooper's crucial essay "Postcolonial Studies and the Study of History" provides an important call to address the historical specificities of colonialism, Ann Laura Stoler concludes an engaging essay on "imperial debris" with a plea for "an effective history of the present," one able "to refocus our historical lens on distinctions between what is residual and tenacious, what is dominant but hard to see, and not least what is emergent in today's imperial formations" (Stoler 211). In *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, Neil Lazarus writes that before the academic outbreak of "postcolonial theory" in the 1990s, the term was used by historians of imperialism as a simple historiographical category. Thus, during the 1970s authors like Hamza Alavi and John Saul made use of the term to describe the moment following decolonization. Lazarus writes that "postcolonial" was a "periodizing term" endowed with historical and not ideological value (Lazarus 3). The postcolonial indicated historical determination, while politically charged terms were already available: "capitalism and socialism; imperialism and anti-imperialism; first-world and third-world; self-determination and neo-colonialism; center and periphery; modernization, development, dependency" (3).

A simple historical understanding of the postcolonial, however, does not imply any devaluation or dismissal of this concept. On the contrary, Lazarus's reflections show that the earlier meaning of the word, indicating the period following decolonization, is something contemporary critics should return to and retrieve. Indeed, only a historical materialist sense of the term can prevent any mention of "postcolonialism" from becoming a presentist ideology, a replacement of real historical understanding and social engagement against capitalism and imperialism. In a way, the postcolonial should avoid becoming "postcolonialism." In his introduction, Lazarus develops his argument that the emergence of postcolonial studies coincided with main historical adjustments. The end of decolonization struggles for national independence entailed

a downturn of the “insurgent national liberation movements and revolutionary socialist ideologies in the early 1970s” (5).

The return to the 1970s which should be taken as point of departure is but a beginning for recovering the past in order to construct a different future. Post-colonial discourse should contrast the “monumentalization” of the anticolonial past and become useful to the struggles against the hegemony of neoliberal economics. In an essay titled “Predicting the Past,” Deepika Bahri suggests a compelling meditation on this issue. Taking up some crucial questions posed by Arif Dirlik in his essay, “The Past as Legacy and Project,” Bahri writes that the “truly resistive postcolonial quest” must be for a different way of experiencing time, in order to “decipher both the script of domination . . . as well as the trace of a utopia that is yet to be” (Bahri 503).

The kind of historical sense defined by postcolonial discourse should oppose the idea that there are no alternatives to the dominant system. Opposition to neoliberal capitalism needs to be complemented by a sense of the possibility of constructing alternatives to it. Following Raymond Williams’s use of the terms “alternative” and “oppositional” in his important essay “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,” it might be suggested that the postcolonial situation is caught between being part of an oppositional stance towards the present, and the possibility of retrieving, inventing, and constructing practices, experiences, meanings, and values subverting the dominant culture of capitalism. Without opposition, alternatives risk being incorporated and domesticated by the dominant system. Still, opposition in itself is unable to point to a qualitatively different way of living, a future society free from the violence of accumulation and exploitation.

The main point of my reflections can be summarized by stating that there is a dialectics of alternative and opposition to which postcolonial intellectuals should attend to. Critique of the neoliberal order – oppositional in a true sense – should be accompanied by the project of making an alternative to capitalism. In particular, I aim to explore the relationship between a Marxist, historical materialist post-colonial discourse and the neoliberal phase of capitalism that defines the present state of the world economy. David Harvey defines neoliberalism as “theory of political economic practices” that identifies the attainment of well-being in “the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade” (Harvey 22). Neoliberal ideology emerged as part and parcel of a broader, long-term historical process marked by what Harvey calls “accumulation by dispossession,” that is, the global history of capitalism. This is a process that involves a redistribution of wealth “either from the mass of the population toward the upper classes or from vulnerable to richer countries” (35). Harvey explains the process as follows:

- (1) the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations . . . (2) conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusively private property rights; (3) suppression of rights to the commons; (4) commodification of labor power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption; (5) colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets

(including natural resources); (6) monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land; (7) the slave trade . . . the national debt, and, most devastating of all, the use of the credit system as radical means of primitive accumulation.

(35–36)

Within the current phase of capital accumulation, neoliberal doctrines have been naturalized as the only possible way of overcoming economic crises and advancing human well-being, in truth re-establishing class domination and the continued concentration of wealth in the hands of oligopolies through accumulation by dispossession. Can postcolonial theory help change this global situation, instead of merely mirroring or mystifying it? Can discourses on the postcolonial participate in the movements that are already struggling against neoliberalism, from protests against privatization of health and education systems in Europe to the Occupy movement and the strikes of workers and students in places such as South Africa, Chile, and Hong Kong?

A postcolonial historical consciousness involves a return to the 1970s, when capitalism entered its neoliberal stage. Harvey notes that neoliberal policies were implemented as a way of restoring class power in response to the crisis of capitalism in the early 1970s, when a socialist alternative seemed still possible through “the conjoining of labor and urban social movements throughout much of the advanced capitalist world” (Harvey 27). Indeed, in the early 1970s capital accumulation entered a downturn that reached its climax with the crisis of 2007–8. The collapse of the Bretton Woods system, the abandonment of the dollar’s convertibility into gold, and the *coup d’état* ousting socialist Allende and imposing the dictatorship of Pinochet in Chile signed the beginnings of neoliberalism as the new appearance of capital accumulation.

In *Ending the Crisis of Capitalism or Ending Capitalism?*, Samir Amin also describes neoliberalism as a strategy enacted to overcome the crisis of capitalism started in the 1970s. Amin describes it as follows:

[P]rivatization and liberalization aimed at opening up new frontiers for the expansion of capital; the globalised opening that would enable delocalization; the imposition of structural adjustment programmes on the countries of the South; and the liberalization of the rates of interest and currency exchange.

(Amin 23)

Neoliberalism can hence be understood as a new form of “management of the world” characterized by oligopoly capitalism and a new imperialism of Europe, the United States, and Japan.² Far from being the realization of “freedom” on a global marketplace, the neoliberal phase of capitalism is marked by widespread war and violence, concentration of wealth, dispossession and a systematic destruction of what should be common and public through strategies of appropriation and privatization. Between opposition and alternative, postcolonial intellectuals should take up Amin’s question, concerning actually existing struggles against imperial rule and neoliberal policies:

[W]ill these struggles manage to converge in order to pave the long way – or ways – towards the transition to world socialism? Or will these struggles remain

separate from one another, or will they even clash with each other and therefore become ineffective, leaving the initiative with the capital of the oligopolies?

(Amin, *Ending the Crisis*, 3)

Postcolonial reflections could be a way of reconnecting past and future, going back to the past in order to rediscover unrealized potentialities of human liberation. In what follows, I will explore how an influential postcolonial critic, Spivak, has engaged with these issues in her recent book *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. Because of her emphasis on deconstruction, singularity, and the works of Derrida and de Man, Spivak is usually put together with academics whose work was appropriated, as Benita Parry points out, “to license the privileging of ‘discourse’ as the model of social practice, and consequently to promote an incuriosity about enabling socio-economic and political institutions” (Parry 69).

Instead of adding one more critique against Spivak or the ideologies of postcolonialism, I will try to show how Spivak can offer really productive insights on how to think about the dialectics of alternative and opposition in an age of neoliberal globalization. The formation of a materialist postcolonial historical consciousness requires that the struggles left in abeyance at the beginning of the 1970s are neither mourned as a thing of the past nor simply recuperated in a somehow melancholic, nostalgic way. Anticolonial struggles needs to be reactivated, inscribed in a living tradition of resistance against neoliberal globalization. The postcolonial can work as a connective tissue articulating twenty-first century struggles against neoliberal capitalism to twentieth-century ideals of a viable socialist alternative to the imperialist world system.

Indeed, a main problem concerning contemporary struggles is the finding of a shared language and the possibility of creating an internationalist collective subject able to overthrow, not only authoritarian regimes or impositions against democracy and freedom, but also the global system of capitalist exploitation. The idea of the postcolonial is crucial because it identifies a historical and theoretical articulation that can reconnect past struggles against capitalism to contemporary movements of resistance. Thus, academic discourse needs ways to relink to ongoing struggles such as, for instance, the Chilean student protests against privatizing education, the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil, the Maoist insurgency in India, the Anti-Free Trade Strike in Colombia, miners’ strikes in South Africa, the Indignados and Zapatista Movements in Mexico, alongside global movements such as Occupy. Nothing guarantees that the unrest of the twenty-first century will lead to a real, long-term transformation, unless “the struggles of the peoples in the South and in the North succeed in building their convergences into a universal and pluralistic socialist perspective (respecting diversity in the invention of the future)” (Amin, *Ending the Crisis*, 189). For this reason, these convergences can be forged through the idea of struggling against a unifying system of exploitation, capitalism, and the corollary of a world-scale class struggle, where the classes in conflict are constantly being reshaped and redefined. As Giovanni Arrighi, Terence Hopkins, and Immanuel Wallerstein write, this is a “struggle over the development and organization of productive forces; hence over the directional control of means of production and means of livelihood; hence over the social relations factually effecting that control” (67). Class struggle is also a “historical process . . . a process that continually forms and reforms the relational

classes it joins in conflict” (67). Whereas during the twentieth century movements inspired by socialist ideals and national liberation have achieved various degrees of success, the struggle now needs to continue, as Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein note, on a “transformed historical ground” (41) signed by the centralization of capital, the international division of labor, and privatizing policies ruled by the needs of the financial economy. Yet, the transformations of the twenty-first century should not overshadow the profound continuities that join different forms of rebellion in a common history of globalized class struggle.

The introduction of Spivak’s *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012) offers much food for thought to all who have been following Spivak’s work for some years. In one of the most interesting passages of her introduction, Spivak goes back to the 1970s. She writes:

It is time to recode and reterritorialize a message from the 1970s, a time when globalization in its contemporary form was starting to get moving. The Euro-U.S. subject must court schizophrenia as a figure . . . we must plumb the forgotten and mandatorily ignored bi-polarity of the social productivity and social destructiveness of capital and capitalism by affecting the world’s subalterns, in places where s/he speaks, unheard, by way of deep language learning, qualitative social sciences, philosophizing into unconditional ethics.

(Spivak 27)

Spivak’s reference to the 1970s, in this passage, is not only the contemporary form of capitalism, that is neoliberal globalization, but also the time when Gregory Bateson’s *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* redefined the concept of “double bind” at the core of schizophrenia. Spivak adopts Bateson’s perspective in order to “reterritorialize” his message from the 1970s – his theory of the double bind. To put it simply, the double bind is the reception of two contradictory statements that cannot be solved through meta-communication. This situation can lead to schizophrenia or, in Spivak’s reflections, to a new understanding of the role of the intellectual in a neoliberal economic system. In the passage reported above from her introduction, Spivak makes reference to an important contradiction or “bi-polarity” that the intellectual should learn, not to simply “solve” but rather to inhabit productively. The double bind in Spivak’s text is the contradiction between the “social productivity” and the “social destructiveness” of capitalism. The terms adopted by Spivak need to be further qualified.

The reader familiar with the words “recode,” “reterritorialization,” and “schizophrenia” in a philosophical setting is immediately surprised by the absence of extended references to Deleuze and Guattari, two authors who employed these concepts extensively in their works and with whom Spivak engaged in her milestone work *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999). The political and philosophical projects of Deleuze/Guattari and Spivak are substantially different. However, it is really surprising not to find any mention of Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of Bateson, especially of Bateson’s theory of the double bind, as they proposed it in their *Anti-Oedipus*. The point made by Deleuze and Guattari, indeed, is that the “double impasse” or double bind is not productive of schizophrenia (psychosis). The double bind is the result of superimposing the grid of psychiatric or psychoanalytic categories, especially the organizing principle of the Oedipus complex, on schizophrenic patients.³ According

to Deleuze and Guattari the double bind occurs when schizophrenia is submitted to the theory of Oedipus as organizing principle. The double bind derives from the submission of schizophrenia to the forced alternative of having either to become “normal,” that is, resolve the Oedipus complex, or having to become “neurotic,” that is, repress the drives of the id. The crucial aspect of the double bind, hence, is not so much the problem of receiving two contradictory messages, but of being faced with a contradiction that reproduces a system of power and authority from which one cannot escape: in the case of Deleuze and Guattari, this is the power of the Oedipus complex reproduced by the psychoanalyst.

Spivak seems to tackle the crucial problem that Deleuze and Guattari pointed out in relation to the double bind: what is the political and social implication of the double bind? Can the double bind have any role in transforming society, dismantling the status quo? Or, rather, does the double bind simply reproduce a social order by excluding alternatives and immobilizing social action? The sort of social transformation aimed at by Deleuze and Guattari is not the same that is envisaged by Spivak: the former point at the unconscious as the site of social subversion, whereas the latter is interested in the concrete existence of the dispossessed in a world system defined by the international division of labor. Notwithstanding her identification of double bind and schizophrenia (unlike Deleuze and Guattari), Spivak emphasizes the most problematic aspect of the double bind. The issue at stake between Spivak’s and Deleuze/Guattari’s positions is whether the contradiction faced in a situation of powerlessness can become a tool for social and political transformation. The contradiction experienced by Spivak, however, has not to do with the Oedipus complex, but with the construction of a society alternative to neoliberal capitalism, that is, the possibility of socialism today.

In the passage from Spivak’s *Aesthetic Education* mentioned at the beginning of the second part of my essay, the double bind or “bi-polarity” is the simultaneous “productivity” and “destructiveness” of capitalism. As Marx pointed out in the first volume of *Capital*, the capitalist mode of production is characterized by a fundamental aspect: the confrontation between, on the one hand, the capitalists – “owners of money and commodities” – and, on the other hand, the proletariat, “men possessing nothing but their own labor-power” (Marx 273). The concept of “labor-power” is a central feature of capitalism. In Marx’s words, capitalism “arises only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence finds the free worker available, on the market, as the seller of his own labor-power” (274). Capitalism depends on the alienation of the worker’s productive abilities through a process that transforms these abilities into a commodity that the worker can “freely” sell to the capitalist, in order to be exploited by the latter. The capitalist “consumes” the workers’ labor-power in order to produce wealth. However, this wealth is not entirely given back to the workers. The working class is hence deprived of a part of the wealth it constantly produces. The remaining part of wealth produced by the workers is appropriated by the capitalists who aim to realize it by expanding the production and making more profit. Marx poignantly wrote, “the worker himself constantly produces objective wealth, in the form of capital, an alien power that dominates and exploits him” (716). This process of exploitation is based upon an abstraction: the commodification of labor-power, which becomes a commodity that can be consumed by the capitalist, and which is then at the basis of a process of accumulation of wealth. Capitalism reproduces social relations through the commodification of labor.

In her reading of Marx, Spivak emphasizes that this process of abstraction and production of wealth is the precondition of capitalist exploitation, but, paradoxically, may be the precondition of socialism as well. In “What Is Left of Theory?” – an essay reprinted in *Aesthetic Education* – Spivak provides a reading of Marx that plays a fundamental role in her conception of an aesthetic education. Spivak writes, “when labor is abstracted into labor-power, it is used for capital accumulation by the capitalist; only if it is still abstracted into labor-power can it be thus used by associated workers, for socialism” (Spivak 193). Capital has a tendency to unify people, to create social relations through the mechanisms of production. The double bind that Spivak addresses concerns the possibility of creating social justice by abusing the abstraction of capital. Instead of adopting the productiveness of the capitalist mode of production to reproduce capitalism as a social and economic system, there might be the possibility of dismantling capitalism by redistributing the wealth it constantly produces, adopting the productiveness of capital in order to create social justice and equality. Indeed, Spivak follows the reflections of Teodor Shanin, who writes in an essay published shortly after 1989:

The substance of socialism has never been its ability to act as an elixir to stimulate “development” and the GNP, nor its capacity to reveal the inevitable future to everyone else. Socialism as a real human phenomenon has been about the ideas and images of justice.

(Shanin 73)

This possibility of socialism as social justice depends on the ability to inhabit the kind of socialization produced by the abstraction of capital, in a way that would overthrow capitalism as system.

This is what Spivak calls the “pharmacology” of the social as understood by Marx: the social, that is, the association of workers through the commodification of labor, is a *pharmakon*, both medicine and poison.⁴ It is poison because, under capitalism, the subjection of workers to the commodification of labor makes them instruments in the reproduction of capitalism. However, it is also medicine because, through commodification of labor, a surplus is produced that could be redistributed, working towards an alternative form of human existence not ruled by the violence and injustice of capital accumulation. The possibility of socialism relies on the ability to turn the violence of capital on its head, to use it for abolishing capitalism and constructing an alternative global society. Yet, the crucial question is: how can the poison turn into a medicine? How can the transition from global capitalism to socialism be achieved?

The main point Spivak makes is that the only hope of realizing socialism rests with an “epistemological revolution” that needs to pass through the contradiction of capitalism instead of simply rejecting or denying it. The passage from the current state of things to a socialist future is not pre-determined and cannot be enforced. Historical change entails an acknowledgement of what Susan Buck-Morss calls “the hidden potentialities of the present, the untimeliness of our time that demands in response a rupture in collective imagination, a transforming rescue of tradition that is the antithesis of reactive return” (Buck-Morss 77). Spivak’s reflections complement this awareness of the potentialities of history with the call for a kind of intellectual labor able to create the preconditions for historical change. Spivak develops some

crucial aspects of her argument in an endnote of her introduction, where she engages with the movement of alterglobalization and, in particular, the concluding work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* trilogy, *Commonwealth* (2009).

Whereas Hardt and Negri analyze very thoroughly the productiveness of capital, what they call the process of "biopolitical production" of labor, what these authors miss is that "without a rearrangement of desires toward the impossible willing of the law, persistently and epistemologically inscribed, there is no looking forward to a just society" (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education*, 517–518). Spivak draws on Schiller's concept of aesthetic education to supplement the revolutionary ontology of Hardt and Negri. The term "aesthetic" is adopted by Spivak to indicate a use of the education in the humanities, especially the study of literature, as a way of forming citizens. What is "aesthetic" pertains to the habits, desires, and emotions instead of being merely theoretical understanding or knowledge. The aesthetic is the link between habit, perception, and thought. Spivak's aesthetic education involves "English teachers reaching hearts and minds, against the interests of a maximal capitalism" (11). Spivak's concept of the aesthetic is greatly influenced by Romanticism, yet she also opposes the individualistic ideology of the creative imagination advocated by Romantic poets. Spivak's aesthetics could be affiliated to the Romantic critique of what Michael Lowy calls the "*quantification of life*, i.e. the total domination of (quantitative) exchange value, of the cold calculation of price and profit, and of the laws of the market, over the whole social fabric" (Lowy, "The Romantic and Marxist Critique," 892). Without recourse to ethics and the aesthetic, Hardt and Negri's notion of democracy seems to remain unviable, bound to a repetition of the past. In her reading of Hardt and Negri's *Commonwealth*, Spivak engages with the concept of "multitude," defined by Hardt and Negri as a political project aimed at constituting a collective subject able to oppose capitalism today. The multitude is not a descriptive, but rather a programmatic category: it identifies the aim of constructing a global political subject able to be together against capitalism without being unified by a hegemonic power or ideology. The multitude is not a social class because it is not based on exclusions and oppositions. Instead, it is an inclusive project of keeping together different, or rather "singular," forms of resistance against capital. It is a process of making politics through a cooperation of the oppressed, what Hardt and Negri explain as "the conflictual and cooperative interactions of singularities in the common" (Hardt and Negri 175). Spivak's remarks on Negri are a very important argument to be taken on in discourses on the "postcolonial" today. Indeed, Spivak writes:

. . . insofar as they [Hardt and Negri] say that "the multitude is not a spontaneous political subject but a project of political organization, thus shifting the discussion from being the multitude to making the multitude," I can go along with them. . . . I can never accept, however, that the multitude "authors" itself in "an un-interrupted process of collective self-transformation" . . . producing a desire for a real, rather than the actually existing, commonwealth in a robust extra-moral sense.

(Spivak 518)

The point at issue, in other words, is the construction of a collective subject able to overthrow capitalism – the making of an alternative society, a redefinition of the

“social” itself in a way that could oppose the current state of things. Spivak does not share Negri’s trust in the fact that the multitude “authors itself” – there is still need for education, for the dissemination of democratic habits, that is, the desire of turning the socialization of capital into a will to redistribute, a real alternative to capitalism.

The question concerns what Spivak calls a “reflexive rearrangement of desires” (11), whether the form of sociality produced by oppression under capitalism can become a motor for overthrowing capitalism itself. It is not the awareness of being exploited, hence class consciousness, which paves the way to socialism, but a real “epistemological revolution” able to instill a democratic habit and change the will and desire of the oppressed. Spivak makes this more explicit in her introduction:

Here let me point out the obvious failure of any Marxism to produce the impulse to redistribute without state control and enforcement. The breakdown of the first wave of Marxist experimentation through the seduction of capitalism for leaders and people alike may have something to do with the absence of the ethical aspects of communism in the epistemological project of popular education. If ethics and aesthetics are defined as devoid of and even as opposed to the political, which is confined to a certain state-formation and structure and a certain management of the economic, we can hope for a short or enforced life for the communist system.
(Spivak 18)

The double bind pointed out by Spivak is the place of the ethical-aesthetic-political impasse: without “an impulse to redistribute” there is no hope of achieving socialism, and this impulse can only be created through education. The essential contribution of Spivak to Marxism is hence her emphasis on the problem of how humanities education can help create an alternative society through the struggle against capitalism. Spivak suggests that Marxism is still caught in a “freedom from,” a struggle against the capitalist order of things, but not yet ready for a real “freedom to,” that is, the realization of an alternative society, not through enforcement or the power of the state, but as something that is actively willed and desired by the multitude. The precondition for realizing socialism is the construction of a sense of the social able to explain why “people as a whole would want to exercise the freedom to arrange for the upkeep of other people” (198). Without this ethical, democratic impulse turned into a reflexive “habit,” any political transformation runs the risk of disintegrating or simply repeating the history of the past.

Discourses on the postcolonial, today, need to address the ethical and political issues raised by Spivak. How can these discourses contribute to the struggle against capitalism? Debates on the postcolonial are not a substitute for really-existing social movements against the world economic system, nor should they occlude the reality of class struggle on a global scale. The central question concerns the creation of values, meanings, and practices that would not repeat the past, but rather reconnect the past with the future, recovering the hopes of struggles against imperialism. Post-colonial discourse can be seen as part of a humanistic education contributing to the creation of democratic habits and what Spivak calls a “will to socialism” opposing the violence and injustice of accumulation by dispossession. A postcolonial historical consciousness needs to be motivated by an ethical impulse, what Michael Lowy significantly describes as a “universal moral exigency – to fight for the abolition of

unjust and inhuman social systems . . . irrespective of the chances of victory and whatever the ‘scientific’ predictions of the future” (Lowy, *Fire Alarm*, 114).

An aesthetic education should involve a sense of historicity able to contrast the current phase of capitalism as the only possible alternative. The study of literature can become the place where this sense of history is reconnected to the awareness of the injustice of capitalism. Thus, close reading and the learning of the languages and literary cultures of different regions of the world can become, instead of production of knowledge and data, the occasion for grasping the effects of capitalism on societies and environments. More radically, the study of literature can lead to the formation of subjects – citizens – who have grasped the bi-polarity of capitalism not so much on a mere theoretical level, but as a concrete situation affecting the perception of the world around us. The “ethical” aspect of Spivak’s perspective can be understood as a striving to achieve a sense of justice and power of action, an impulse that Paulo Freire defined as a “struggle for humanization” (Freire 50). Aesthetic education contributes to the struggle of the oppressed to become active agents without becoming oppressors in their turn: it participates in the making of a qualitatively new transformation that would not merely reiterate the past.

In the preface of a very thought-provoking book titled *Between Past and Future*, Hannah Arendt points out a crucial problem, which underlies the issues facing post-colonial discourse in the current historical conjuncture. Against the accent on novelty, break, and disjuncture proper to a cultural logic well-suited to the needs of neoliberalism, socialist alternatives have to be forged by dealing with the question addressed by Arendt, the relation between past and future in a world deprived of “tradition,” that is, of universally recognized rules of cultural transmission. Arendt wrote her reflections on the issue in relation to the problem of the aftermath of the Resistance. Following a remark by poet René Char, Arendt proposed compelling meditations on the idea that “our inheritance was left to us by no testament” (Arendt 3). In the words of Arendt, this sentence captures the situation of the inheritor left with an important inheritance but no blueprint for action, no instruction about how it should be used and kept. Arendt wrote:

The testament, telling the heir what will rightfully be his, wills past possessions for a future. Without testament or, to resolve the metaphor, without tradition – which selects and names, which hands down and preserves, which indicates where the treasures are and what their worth is – there seems to be no willed continuity in time and hence, humanly speaking, neither past nor future.

(Arendt 5)

Similarly, the situation inhabited by postcolonial intellectuals is determined by an apparent loss of continuity and tradition. If there is something that gets to be bottom of the neoliberal order, it is the beginning of a new phase where the heritage of decolonization and the struggles for socialism seem to have passed on without leaving any testament. The postcolonial condition started with the neoliberal regime of the 1970s because the political struggles for decolonization and socialism were felt to be a mere “failure” and a great disillusionment paved the way for an unchallenged adjustment to the rules of capital accumulation, a new phase in the history of imperialism. Yet, as John Comaroff has noted in a recent essay, “those forces covered by the adjective

neoliberal, not to mention its adverbs of practice, are no less colonizing than the forms of empire to which the global South has been subjected before now” (Comaroff 146). A deep historical continuity can be recognized as a link between past and present forms of exploitation, from the expansion of capitalism in the colonial era to the current neoliberal stage of accumulation by dispossession.

Drawing on a parable by Kafka, Arendt reimagines the contemporary as a situation caught between two forces: a force from the past, pushing the present forward, towards the future, and a synchronic push from the future, preventing the present from making a leap forward and, on the contrary, keeping the present back, pushing it toward the past. The present is described by Arendt as a gap, an interval caught between the opposing forces of past and future. In Arendt’s words there is:

a small track of non-time which the activity of thought beats within the time-space of mortal men and into which the trains of thought, of remembrance and anticipation, save whatever they touch from the ruin of historical and biographical time.

(Arendt 12–13)

What is really inspiring about Arendt’s reflection is that she provides a perspective on this “gap” that connects very deeply with Spivak’s plea for an aesthetic education – an education, that is, reconnecting “reason” and thought to desire, habits, and the material conditions of existence where thought takes place. The aesthetic education necessary to provoke the epistemological revolution that will create the multitude takes place in an untimely region, in a gap that is not physical or chronological but coeval with human existence and yet present as a “small track of non-time” within the time of human life. According to Arendt, this non-time within time has a specific quality, which is explained as a “small non-time-space in the very heart of time” that “cannot be inherited and handed down from the past,” but rather must be rediscovered and “ploddingly” paved anew by each generation (Arendt 13). The extraordinary thought presented by Arendt identifies the realm of thought as something that cannot be inherited. The exercise of thinking is, for her, the antidote to a past that has been left without testament. This view implies that the gap between past and future is the space where each new generation needs to rediscover possibilities of change, reconstructing a sense of the future qualitatively different from the present. In the postcolonial condition, this would amount to the necessity of studying the history of decolonization and the struggles for socialism in a different way, with the aim of reviving it and “ploddingly” paving it anew, instead of keeping it back, inert, in a past forever gone.

A recent example may be the case of ex-anti-colonial fighters who in 2011 sued the British Government requiring compensation for the tortures inflicted by the British during the Mau Mau rebellion, which took place in colonized Kenya from 1952 to 1960. How should the memory of this extremely violent episode of imperial history be remembered? As Priyamvada Gopal writes in the pages of *The Guardian*, tens of thousands were killed by the British in the attempt to suppress the anti-colonial insurgency. Gopal asks:

How should Britain and Britons deal with the (not all that distant) imperial past? From racial hierarchies to artificial national borders and a deeply inequitable

economic system which enshrined as a core principle the devastating profiteering we see around us, imperial history still shapes all our lives within Britain and beyond.

If the memory of imperial violence and anti-colonial resistance is crucial today, this is not solely because anti-colonial memories are a powerful antidote to colonial amnesia and colonial nostalgia. Going back to the past can reconnect contemporary struggles to what upheavals of the past have not yet accomplished, and constantly raise the question of justice and reparation for past and present forms of oppression.

The stakes of an aesthetic education in an era of neoliberalism, indeed, have to do with the construction of this alternative sense of history, where the struggle for a real decolonization has been interrupted but does not rest in peace. It is only by rediscovering and resuming the incomplete task of the liberation against both imperialism and capitalism that a return to the past could lead to making a real transformation in the present. This is something that Spivak indicated in one of her most hopeful moments, in a very hopeless perspective on the contemporary:

If, instead of each identitarian group remaining in its own enclave, some of us engage in ab-using the enabling violation of our colonial past to converse with each other, we may be able not only to turn globalization around, but also to supplement the necessary uniformization of globalization with linguistic diversity. But such hope is out of joint; better doubt.

(Spivak 28)

What is “out of joint” in such thoughts is not hope but thought itself. And yet, it is precisely by inhabiting the gap between past and future that the humanities can make the difference, in a continuing dialectics of opposition and alternative. Aesthetic education cannot be inherited. It looks at the past in order to discover new potentialities in it, assuming the task to remember and resume what past struggles against capitalism have left unfinished.

ENDNOTES

1. Since its establishment as an academic discipline, postcolonial discourse has been seen as a mystification of the concrete reality of capitalism, a critique that Arif Dirlik famously put forward in his pivotal essay “The Postcolonial Aura” (Dirlik 1994). Twenty years later, critiques of this field of inquiry seem to follow along similar lines, as appears from Vivek Chibber’s recent book, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak shows convincingly Chibber’s disregard for the “range, roots and ramifications of postcolonial studies” in her review of the book (Spivak 2014, 185).
2. In their “After Neoliberalism,” the late Stuart Hall and colleagues provide an important analysis of neoliberal hegemony and its underlying ideals of “the supposed naturalness of ‘the market,’ the primacy of the competitive individual, the superiority of the private over the public” (13), while Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston demonstrate in their introduction to *Neoliberalism* that “neoliberalism involves extensive and invasive interventions in every area of social life” (4).
3. According to Deleuze and Guattari, “the double bind is not the schizophrenic [i.e. psychotic] process; on the contrary, the double bind is Oedipus insofar as it arrests the motion

of the process” (121). Deleuze and Guattari go back to Gregory Bateson in order to revise substantially the meaning of this theory: “*Double bind* is the term used by Gregory Bateson to describe the simultaneous transmission of two kinds of messages, one of which contradicts the other. . . . Bateson sees in this phenomenon a particularly schizophrenizing situation. . . . It seems to us that the double bind, the double impasse, is instead a common situation, opedipalizing par excellence” (88). Deleuze and Guattari do not attribute the origin of schizophrenia to the double bind: on the contrary, the double impasse is the result of the forced channeling of schizophrenia into the false alternative between “normality” and “neurosis.” Schizophrenia is completely foreign to Oedipal theory and its double bind, as Deleuze and Guattari remark: “But isn’t it true instead that, in psychosis, the familial complex appears precisely as a stimulus whose quality is a matter of indifference, a simple inductor not playing the role of organizer, where the intensive investments of reality bear on something totally different (the social, historical, and cultural fields)?” (134).

4. The concept of *pharmakon* testifies to Derrida’s influence on Spivak. In a chapter of *Dissemination*, Derrida writes: “the word *pharmakon*, even while it means *remedy*, cites, re-cites, and makes legible that which *in the same word* signifies, in another spot and on a different level of the stage, *poison*” (Derrida, 100–101). Spivak makes this insight productive by exploring the commodification of labor proper to capital as *pharmakon*: medicine and poison.

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CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

THE JOURNEY OF THE WEST AFRICAN MIGRANT

Francophone cinematic representations
in *Frontières*, *Bamako*, and *La Pirogue*



Kenneth W. Harrow

Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary warned on Monday that his country was being overrun. “The migrants are not just banging on our door; they are breaking it down,” he said. “Our borders are in danger, our way of life built on respect for the law, Hungary and the whole of Europe is in danger.”

—*New York Times*, September 23, 2015¹

The migration of vast number of people from the Global South to the Global North has generated enormous political and social crises. The lives of many people, especially those from Africa and the Middle East heading to Europe, have been at stake. News of the dramatic fighting that disrupted Syria, and the passage of their refugees through Turkey, Hungary, Croatia, and Austria, to Germany, was preceded by many years by equally painful accounts of sub-Saharan Africans, many from West Africa, attempting to cross the Mediterranean to arrive in Spain, Italy, or Greece.

As the new millennium has proceeded increasingly under the banner of neoliberal economic theory, more and more African governments have been reduced in size. IMF and World Bank loans stipulated that private enterprise replace public entities, and that tariffs be lifted to permit free trade. Africans lost their jobs, their government support, and their ability to compete with international corporations in many domains, including agriculture, fishing, and clothing. The young men left for the north, willing to risk their lives – to become cargo in shaky barques – to get to Europe.

Their dangerous passages have marked history, and now are being re-created in films. One of the earliest such films to detail the crossing from Senegal to Mauretania, and then across the Sahara to Algeria and Morocco, was Mostefa Djadjam’s *Frontières*, which was made in 2001. It focused on the lives of a number of West Africans who managed to get as far as Morocco, despite great obstacles, but then who either died in attempting to cross the sea, or else were picked up and repatriated. Other films, like *Bamako* (2006), indicted the practices of the World Bank and its repercussions in Mali, while more recently *La Pirogue* (2013) takes us on the perilous journey of a group of Senegalese and Guineans who attempted to cross the Atlantic from

Dakar to Cape Verde. They have all painted pictures of hardship and struggle in the face of current conditions in Africa – filling in the stories of what Africans experienced before arriving at the shores of Europe.

These films are but the tip of the iceberg of many that show how migrants and refugees braved the elements and had to face hostile smugglers. Those who survived formed a new generation of diaspora peoples destined to leave home, where they had been autochthonous, or indigenous, and eventually become the foreigners – the “allothones” – in a new homeland. In order to follow their story this chapter will undertake to describe the conditions that led to their departures, and will explore three key Francophone films that have contributed to the formation of this new genre of migrant journey films that speak to this great upheaval of our times.

I. THE SETTING FOR THE JOURNEY

Recent diaspora cinemas, including especially those focusing on peoples from African countries, have taken up the drama and tragedy of the immigrants’² lives in the time of neoliberalism and war. The massive movements of people from the Global South to the Global North have been crystalized with images in the press capturing the drama of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing from violence. A recent *New York Times* editorial stated:

But perhaps not since the Jews were rounded up by Nazi Germany have there been as many images coming out of Europe of people locked into trains, babies handed over barbed wire, men in military gear herding large crowds of bedraggled men, women and children.

(*New York Times*, September 4, 2015)³

The long-term press of migration has become increasingly dramatic as reports of ships with hundreds on board going down in the Mediterranean multiplied during the summer of 2015, culminating with hundreds of thousands of Syrians, Eritreans, Iraqis, Afghanis, and South Sudanese seeking to cross into Europe where previously the largest proportion of migrants were from West Africa, notably Mali and Senegal. Violence in North Africa, especially Libya, has also driven more from that region to attempt to cross the Mediterranean to Italy, Greece, and Spain.

Historically, the vast disruptions of warfare have accounted for massive movements of people: millions of Rwandans, Burundians, and Congolese have either died or become refugees since the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and the subsequent overthrow of Mobutu in the Congo that led to violent conflict and the despoliation of the East Congo by militias and global competitors in the extractive industries. The conflicts typically entailed some valuable resource, like diamonds and gold in Sierra Leone and Liberia; coltan, tin, timber, and gold in East Congo; oil in Angola and Nigeria, and so on. The link between oil, weapons, the subsequent threat to the sovereignty of the Malian state after the collapse of Libya, along with the intervention of the French, and the displacement of people from the conflict, mimicked the patterns of violence and migration from earlier wars.⁴ In all cases, the flow of capital facilitated the exchange of oil and mineral resources for weapons leading to enormously violent conflicts affecting millions of people, such as those living in Darfur, South

Sudan, the Congo and more recently Syria, driving them to seek refuge in neighboring states.⁵

The economics of neoliberalism has also accounted for emigration. With the diminishment of African state sovereignty and the increase in freewheeling capitalist trading, at times in defiance of UN sanctions, the weapons trade enabled regional militias to overpower state forces. The state could no longer guarantee the safety of its citizens. The ascendancy of neoliberal policies since the 1980s when Structural Adjustment Programs became predominant in Africa, led to African states becoming indebted to the World Bank and IMF, dramatically transforming the political patterns in African states. Jean and John Comaroff⁶ have detailed some of the ways neoliberal policies have led to shifts in African economies and social identities and values. They describe how “neoliberal conditions render ever more obscure the rooting of inequality in structures of production,” and how the ascendancy of ethnic-based identity politics has supplanted national identities. Meanwhile, “class comes to be understood, in both popular and scholarly discourse, as yet another personal trait or lifestyle choice. Which is why [class], like citizenship, is measured increasingly by the capacity to transact and consume.”⁷ Consumption has become accepted as a right, and the value placed upon commodities has superseded ties associated with family or community, fostering new “occult” beliefs in the acquisition of wealth.⁸ The mysteries surrounding the acquisition of wealth in this time of rising Pentecostalism in Africa has come to be attributed, especially in Nollywood films coming from Nigeria, to pacts established between the rising urban millionaires and Satan. Capitalism is understood more in occult than scientific terms, with occultism rising as a dominant genre in contemporary films.

Neoliberal economics have had a dramatic impact on the distribution of wealth in the world, and especially in Africa, where the newly minted wealthy classes live at an enormous distance from ordinary Africans, greater than any time since colonial rule. The global order has imposed conditions of economic duress that exceed those of the past. The gap between the powerful and wealthy, the “big men” and the poor, has become visible to many who find it increasingly galling and intolerable. Recent African cinema has played on those sentiments in powerful images (*Bamako* [Sissako, 2006]; *Viva Riva* [Djo Munga, 2010]; *A Screaming Man* [Haroun, 2010]). In Afolayan’s *The Figurine* (2009), the ascension of wealth and power is represented as being as inexplicable as the fall, and by casting it in biblical terms, it becomes apocalyptic.

In global terms, this gap in wealth has resulted in a new definition of space, with the Global North and Global South replacing postcolonial or “Third World” designations. “Europe,” formerly signifying the metropole, now refers to a fortress whose borders are intended to keep the “barbarians” at the gate. Despite the European Union concept of “Europe” as a community of shared humanitarian values, current refugee and immigrant flows have created a dystopia where the EU finds itself scrambling not just to handle an influx of enormous numbers of refugees who are desperate to escape wars and repression, but to avoid the bitter pill of paying for this situation. Some countries like Denmark, Hungary, and Croatia are actively trying to discourage the arrival of refugees, let alone migrants.

The long-standing conditions governing migration between Africa and Europe have not always been of this nature. In the aftermath of World War II, as France

and England sought to rebuild their industrial infrastructure, colonial subjects were recruited to work at factories, in agriculture and the building trades.⁹ With the economic crises of the 1970s, and the increased numbers of foreign populations, xenophobic reactions grew, along with reactionary political parties. At one point France offered to pay Maghrebians workers to return to North Africa. The conservative movements of the decade that followed brought Thatcher and Reagan to office, and with them the rise of neoliberal economic policies. By the new millennium, the ascendancy of neoliberal capitalism and globalization had come to be viewed by many as inevitable, especially following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989. With the decline in taxation of the wealthy, and the vast increases in corporate profits, came increasing gaps in wealth between the classes, and the acquisition of great wealth became the subject of mystifications. Globalization seemed to be marked by monumental flows of capital and power whose contours were inexplicably complicated and whose unstoppable forces were beyond the control of national entities. Often, “global” like “millennial” denoted powers that only some spectacular, neo-baroque extravaganza could represent in films, often taking the form of blockbusters whose budget would exceed that of many nations of the Global South.¹⁰

The belief in occult forces being tied to capitalist profits is not new. The global world that frames the Comaroffs’ vision of millennial capitalism is one that was heavily shaped by the massive transportation of cargo in ship containers. The scale was new (beginning with the use of supercargo ships in 1980s)¹¹ but not the relations between the Global North and South. The ability of large supercargo ships to rapidly traverse the oceans made it possible to ship great quantities of Asian goods to the West inexpensively and expeditiously. However, the phenomenon of international trade by sea was old, dating back to the inception of the western seagoing trade in the 16th century. Millennial capitalism, just as it had been evoked in the seagoing cargo ships, seemed to engender the magical belief in the arrival of some golden age, like the earlier notion of cult magic centered in the cargo itself. Just as slaves turned their condition of filth and labor into gold, so too would cargo effect the miraculous. All that



Figure 27.1 Human cargo from *La Pirogue*.

Source: Screenshots from Film DVD. *La Pirogue*: 2012. Director: Moussa Traore.
Production companies: Les Chauves-Souris, Arte France Cinéma, Astou Films.

was needed, for Melanesian cargo cults, was the proper ritual act (Burridge 1969). The cults, beginning with colonial commercial networks that associated trade and wealth in some mysterious way in the eyes of the indigenous peoples, centered on the cargo that the ships brought in, and the power and wealth of those who controlled the trade. According to Burridge, cargo cults arose during times of crisis, which saw the end of the old social order. The mystical processes of this capitalist circulation of labor and goods have been described as being marked by occult practices by the Comaroffs (2001), who complete the description of occult capitalism, painting for today the new world order of what we can call “migrant capitalism”:

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the cargo, glimpsed in large part through television, takes the form of huge concentrations of wealth that accrue, legitimately or otherwise, to the rich of the global economy – especially the enigmatic new wealth derived from financial investment and management, from intellectual property and other rights, from cyberspace, from transport and its cognate operations, and from the supply of various post-Fordist services.¹²

The fortunes that were accumulated so quickly were also somehow joined to a logic that brought into play the mysteries of the market, of the new technologies that were responsible for “unimaginable fortunes amassed by the ever more rapid flow of value, across time and space, into the fluid coordinates of the local and the global.”¹³

What the initial cargo cults set the stage for were not only the beliefs concerning the transportation of massive quantities of consumer capitalist commodities, but of cheap labor itself. Before the onset of industrial capitalism it was slaves who were transported in the ocean vessels that plied the routes between Africa and the Americas from the 16th to 19th centuries. Now we can extend the image, the metaphor, of the slave ship to multitudinous vessels transporting migrants from the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, or the west coast of Africa, to southern Europe. Transporters, selling the voyage – travel agents for the desperate – offer a range of packets. For the wealthier migrant-traveler, a first class ticket, costing thousands, will purchase a place in a private car, with false travel documents, that insures a safe trip across the borders or seas, as in those passing onto ferries from Calais to Dover.¹⁴ For the poorer travelers, the comforts decline as the risks increase, and in all cases passages to England are available at a range of prices. No attempt to keep current with these practices will succeed. Every day new barriers are set up – in past years to Melilla and Ceuta, today to Hungary, and tomorrow to another opportune route taken by thousands of desperate refugees. When the human cargo arrives, the desperate as well as the comfortable will ultimately be selling their labor on a market that has been established, at times with state government agencies facilitating it, at times in illegal shops, so as to enable the continued production of more commodities at bargain rates.

Geschiere and Nyamnjoh¹⁵ trace the rise of local occultism in Africa to the 1980s Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and neoliberal economic policies. The rising economic pressures, and the diminished power of the state, engendered a broad sense of helplessness, and led to the growth of Internet scams, dubbed 419 in Nigeria, and a range of practices by the nouveaux sophisticates of the virtual world. One such figure

was the feyman. According to Fisiy and Geschiere the term “feyman” originated in Cameroonian pidgin to “faire quelqu’un,” that is, to con someone.

It gained currency in the mid-1990s, but within only a few years has become a new role model, especially for the young. . . . An essential element in the many stories about feymen is the magical quality of their wealth and the global span of their operations.¹⁶

As with the cargo cults, it was believed that if there is money in abundance, it must be due to grace or magic, and not just to the ability to win over the gullible. “[I]t is clear that the magical qualities attributed to their enigmatic accumulation of wealth”¹⁷ indicate that the rise of occult forces in the 1980s that came with economic neoliberalism was widespread. Unlike the 1960s and 1970s when the rhetoric of development was subordinated to the logic of rational thought and progress, as understood at that time, with the economic downfall of the 1980s, the rise of SAPs, neoliberalism, and the declining state, came the surprising restoration of “witchcraft” once again as a credible factor in people’s lives.¹⁸ “Apparently the forms of enrichment that have come with economic liberalization have given witchcraft discourses yet another new leave on life.”¹⁹

The conflict between autochthones and allothones, those who “belonged” and claimed ownership over the resources, and those who were “outsiders,” was at the core of the conflict, and their interaction heavily influenced representations in films dealing with migration. Magical encounters, potent forces tied to the ability to overcome obstacles to migrate accompanied the “entanglements” generated by the world-shaping forces of neoliberal capitalism. The cargo labor, its transport and sale, was embodied in cinematic characters in many migrant travel films, whose lives made visible the invisible and magical forces of global capitalism. At the heart of the exchanges in those films, along with the fees paid by migrants for their transport, their anxieties over the voyage, and the aspirations that made the risks seem worthwhile, lay more than commodity values. Home and belonging became dominant tropes. The migrations were shaped by the notion that the right to enjoy life’s benefits was tied to place, and to one’s ability to belong – notions of autochthony.

And at the other end of the voyage, for those in the Global North made apprehensive by the arrival of new immigrants, the immigrants’ struggles led to a politics based on defending one’s right to have access to wealth by virtue of belonging, of being indigenous to a place, and by extension in keeping out those who were not. The outsiders, needing to acquire the status of belonging, had to travel to the brave new world, and if need be risk dying to get there. And the drama that would drive this situation would be elevated when the migrants were actually refugees whose lives would have not only been degraded but put at great risk were they not to emigrate.

This was not the concern of those who already “belonged”: mine, yours, my land, your land, my home, your home, and the transferal of the latter to the former, all this made simple the politics of inclusion and exclusion on which the 21st century began its greatest struggle. We can call it “the voyage and its barriers.”

II. THE FILMS OF THE JOURNEY

In cinematic form typically the voyage is organized around three parts – departure, transformation, return. The initial stage, the Departure, highlights the journey north. The films that I analyze here detail the pressures of those seeking to emigrate to Europe from West Africa, especially through illegal circuits, and generally focus on the difficulties of the journey to Europe, the exploitation of and risks faced by the voyageurs, and at times the premature end of the journey with many dying en route. These include in particular Mostefa Djadjam's *Frontières* (2001) and the account in Abderrahmane Sissako's *Bamako* (2007) of a group of Africans seeking to cross into Europe via Morocco who find themselves cast into the desert where a number of them die. In the same vein, the journey by sea in Moussa Traore's *La Pirogue* (2012) features the risks encountered by a group seeking to reach The Canary Islands, i.e. Spanish territory, by crossing the Atlantic from Senegal.²⁰

In the second stage, the Transformation, one finds films focusing on the precarity of those who succeed in arriving, typically in France, England, or Belgium, but who are living there illegally, and therefore apprehensive about their condition being discovered by the authorities. Again they face threats and exploitation by those who transported them there or who employ them. Many filmmakers have exploited this theme, some in quite effective, moving films, as done so well in Frears's *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002).

Conventionally these accounts deal with figures whose illegal status heighten their dramas, relationships, and possibilities for creating new lives. We see this with Dyana Gaye's *Des étoiles* (2013), as well as in recent films by one of the most popular actors in France, Oumar Sy, who played two roles as an undocumented immigrant in *Untouchables* (2011) and *Samba* (2014). In all these cases the films represent a mix of migrants, often with Africans as protagonists, hiding, living in difficult circumstances, sometimes coping, sometimes breaking, as in *Ainsi meurent les anges* (2001), whose plot involved

Mory, a troubled Senegalese poet (played by writer/director Moussa Sene Absa himself) living outside Paris with his French wife and their children. We watch his marriage fall apart under cross-cultural pressures, specifically his father's demand that he take a second wife in Senegal. Homeless in winter, separated from his children, his poems scattered over a Paris street, Mory returns to Senegal, penniless and with uncertain prospects.²¹

Finally there is another body of films for the third stage, the Return, that deal with those who return home, usually under duress. Currently the highly dramatic conditions of exile, flight, warfare, and economic pressures have led to films that are increasingly melodramatic in their form and rhetoric. With many older return narratives like *Ainsi meurent les anges*, and *Les noms n'habitent nulle part* (1994), the conventional notion of Africans in diaspora is not marked by portraits of those fleeing the continent under desperate conditions. Dyana Gaye's *Des étoiles* further complicates the simplistic narrative by presenting us with three figures whose experiences in going abroad are radically different. Over one winter, through the cities of Dakar, Torino, and New York, we follow the exiled paths of several interconnected characters. For her husband's funeral, Mame Amy returns from New York to Dakar with her 19-year-old son Thierno, who had never been in Africa. Sophie, who leaves

Dakar for Torino to join her husband Abdoulaye, seems destined to leave home for good. Abdoulaye had just arrived in New York with his cousin through an organization of clandestine migrants. For each, autochthony shifts, and exile and diaspora turn into complex patterns of entanglement.

A. *Frontières* and *La Pirogue*

Frontières follows a conventional plotline in tracking the story of a group of migrants from West Africa who travel from Senegal to Morocco in the hope of crossing from Tangiers to Spain. *La Pirogue* is also a “road trip,” although in this case it is a sea-lane that is traveled by the voyagers who are seeking the passage to Europe via the Canary Islands. In recent years, many thousands of Africans have died attempting to cross the Mediterranean or the portion of the Atlantic between Dakar and the Canaries. In both films there are familiar tropes and key moments that come to constitute the components of a new modern genre resembling older Middle Passage narratives. I will focus on two aspects of these films. First, the journey understood as an attempt of the autochthone, the one who already has a home and who “belongs,” to come to a new land where he or she would be the outsider. Eventually the dream of success would involve some degree of giving up one’s old affiliations. The “successful migrant” who integrates, assimilates, and becomes a new person, indicates what it means to change the status of belonging, and the incentive to do so can be quite varied (for instance, whether one learns the new language, or mostly holds on to the old; whether one lives among strangers or with those from one’s home country, and so on).

The second aspect entails greater damage to the subjectivity of the voyager who has to give up his or her autonomy and agency, becoming dispossessed and precarious – often required to sacrifice autonomy and agency by paying for a passage to “freedom” and “the promised land” – to Europe (a trope for the wealthy Global North). The price of the fare entails giving up the freedom enjoyed at home, and thus voluntarily assuming the role of the slave. In fact, the conditions of the paperless migrant en route to and in the North often entails a new form of slavery, and as is ironically stated in *Frontières*, for the first time in history now people are paying to become slaves.²²

In *La Pirogue* and *Frontières*, the narratives mostly begin with the departures from home and end with the failure to arrive at the Newfoundland – Europe, Paris, Nanterre, or Andalusia. The journeys end with death, failure, or the remaining survivors’ *refoulement* [repatriation] back to the very land from which they departed. They had willingly become cargo, accepting the harsh conditions of transport in the trucks’ cold storage area (*Frontières*) or the ship’s hold (*La Pirogue*), risking death to become freight for those who made a living by transporting cargo. The subtitle of *La Pirogue* summed up their need for courage to undertake such a dangerous voyage: *goor fitt*, “qui n’a peur de rien” [those who fear nothing]. But in the end, it was more foolish calculation than brave decision that led to the disasters. They had been duped by the glittering images and stories of the new global age, and the harsh postscript to *La Pirogue* offered the final judgment:

Between 2005–2010, drawn by the mirrors of the west, more than 30,000 West Africans undertook to brave the Atlantic on board simple pirogues. More than 5000 of them died.

In *La Pirogue*, where the narrative of death reaches completion, most of the travelers died, including Kaba, the young man who had been smitten by Nafy. *Frontières* ends with Joe's drowning as he sought to rejoin his girlfriend in Spain. The tragedies are compounded by the loss of young lovers. "Belonging" in Europe represents gaining a new life, a new belonging, new relationships, and even new identities (since all the migrants burned their ID cards so as to avoid being sent back home, the authorities not being able to identify their homeland that way) – all was lost in the futility of the attempt to make the crossing. These are narratives marked by loss – precarity, dispossession, and failure. The trajectory of the narrative lies in the pattern determined by the finality of death, which can be seen, retrospectively, to have haunted the journey from the outset. Its features might be discerned in the following stages.

a. The setting out

In the initial stage of the narrative, the travelers resolve to leave. In *Frontières* we encounter the pirogues (dugout canoes) already in the middle of the Senegal River, crossing over to Mauretania. Though they had already left their homes further south, this opening scene is actually the departure from what is termed in French Africa "l'Afrique noire," which is reinforced with the visible difference between the black migrants being transported, and the lighter skinned transporters who are Mauretanian Arabs. After crossing the river, in the middle of which lies the border between Senegal and Mauretania, the group is brought to a house where they meet other Africans awaiting the vehicles that will carry them north. When those being ferried across the river get to the other side and are met by the older Moor, he asks, what language do they speak, Wolof, Pular, Bambara, and is told, just speak French to them: "They are all the children of De Gaulle."

A similar scene occurs in *La Pirogue*, when a group of Senegalese Fulani arrive in Dakar and come to the port where they meet the other migrants from Guinea waiting to leave. In both cases, the smugglers (in French the term *passeurs* seems closer to their role as transporters, those who make the passage possible) are businessmen waiting to fill the vehicles before leaving. This creates the opportunity for the different people to meet and for their roles as migrants to be established, and for their various languages, nationalities, and religions to be established. Now they are all "illegals," cargo to be transported, more than being Guineans or Fulani, Christians or Muslims. This becomes clear when we learn that they are needed to fill out the manifests. Here they most resemble slaves needed to complete the shipments, as in the period of the slave trade, and their slave-like conditions are suggested both by the way they are ordered about by the passeurs, and by the crowded quarters where they are held.

They must pay for their voyage at this point, and the nature of the commercial exchange is established in that the only material involved is their own bodies. They pay a fixed rate, freight rates for goods to be boxed and shipped as it were, with no opportunity for warnings about their "fragility" or need to be handled with care. It is ironic that in *Frontières* they carry different currencies, come from Anglophone and Francophone countries, have different religions: they are perfect models for the Globalization paradigm, except that it is globalization from below, from the perspective of "les damnés" as Fanon put it. In the West the metaphor for diversity that sells is the

rainbow; but for the human cargo the differences are leveled, even to the point where gender difference matters little in the end.

Frontières is framed by the scenes of crossing the water: the Senegal River at the opening, and the straits of Gibraltar in the end. The crossing of the desert represented the greatest trial; the water, however, proved to be the grave for the irrepressible musician, Joe. The frame in *La Pirogue* is marked by the contemporary consumerist culture. Beginning with the wrestling match in Dakar, the action focuses on football matches. Kaba imagines he can use his legs in Europe to become a football star. His dream of glory comes to a sad end. With the return of the captain of the pirogue Baye at the end, his hands are empty, and most of his pirogue passengers dead. Given 10,000 CFA (about \$20) by a Senegalese charity on his forcible return to Dakar, Baye uses the money to buy his son a football jersey of Barcelona (Barca), the “souvenir” of a failed, deadly journey. When he re-enters his compound, his son runs up to him as though this were a happy reunion with his long-gone father, and he receives the compulsory gift of the jersey. But Baye had purchased it on his way back from the airport, and when he looks up and sees Kine, his wife, in the doorway staring at him, he has nothing to say. The film ends on that note.

b. The discovery of the stowaway gender

There are moments in *Bamako* and *La Pirogue* that convey the quintessential elements of this journey narrative, and they are marked by the role of difference introduced by complicated gender portrayals. In both films, a young woman with short hair, dressed like a man, attempts to enter into the group of men who are braving the voyage. She succeeds far enough to get to the point of no return. Most dramatically in *La Pirogue*, the smuggler, Lansana, furious that Nafy has no way to pay for her voyage, threatens to throw her overboard. Others, who stop him, call him crazy. More conventionally in *Frontières*, Amma has to sell her body to the smugglers in order to be able to continue. In *Bamako*, the young, nameless woman’s story is compressed into a single deathbound moment after the group of migrants are thrown back into the desert by Moroccan authorities, where most of them die. The young woman’s death is the one that is shown.

The story of the young woman who dies in *Bamako* is recounted by Madou who describes how the migrants died in the desert. He tells of the desperate journey in the Sahara where he and some thirty others were ejected by the Moroccan police. He is somber and direct in his account; The Story of the Migrant, we might call it, is told by the survivor who speaks before the camera. His account in the local language brings together the people of the quartier and the compound, and implied African addressees as the audience. For the European audience it is an African voice he or she is hearing, and the European’s sympathies must be tinged by anger and guilt over the treatment ultimately accorded to the migrants at the hands of those in the service of the European fortress. For an African witnessing the performance, this might have been his sister dying in the desert, as Madou repeats the words of the woman, “I can’t go on. There’s no sense in you waiting with me.” In West Africa, many of those hearing this would have known of families whose children might have been on such a voyage.

“There was a woman with us, a Ghanaian,” says Madou. “We didn’t know she was a woman. She was disguised as a boy.” Madou says she was exhausted, and

nothing could be done for her. The fellow travelers in the desert were helpless. The scene is replicated in *Frontières* when Arvey is too weak to go on, but is saved by Joe and Sippi, while the others were willing to abandon him. In *La Pirogue* it is Abou who dives in the sea to try to save those who are stranded on the pirogue they come across in the open sea. In all cases it is the young, impulsive man who puts caring for others before his own safety. In Madou's and Abou's accounts, there was nothing to be done.

In each of the three films, the figure of the young woman is marked by her vulnerability. In *Bamako* she is portrayed in her last moments. As Madou stares disconsolately, remembering, we see what he recalls: a bottle of water placed next to the Ghanaian woman lying, apparently unmoving, on the desert floor. No longer cargo, she becomes another trope, that of death whose story transfixes and transforms the listeners. For Sissako, her dying becomes the occasion for a testimony intended to inculcate those responsible (the setting in *Bamako* is a mock trial of the World Bank).

All three of these accounts portray the presence of the woman as a disruptive factor. In conventional migrant accounts like Udayan Prasad's *Brothers in Trouble* (1995), set in London, we can see how a woman's role in such male communities is structured. The dangerous journey is depicted as one to be undertaken by men, and mostly young men who are courageous or foolish enough to defy the odds. In Prasad's film, it is only men who are depicted making the journey, as is also the case in *La Pirogue* as far as the smugglers know, until Nafy is discovered. When Prasad's protagonist Amir arrives in London, he goes to an immigrant boarding house. The Madam who runs the house is a typically working class older woman, but all the residents are men. When they need to satisfy their sexual needs they bring in a prostitute and line up to have their turn with her.

She, the woman-intruder, is the outsider to the community of men. Without her we have jokes about men managing to cook on their own, with some men assuming the more feminine role. Without her the men can use the "facilities" without inhibition, can exhibit typical qualities of male behavior, can curse, belch, joke, etc. They form a brotherhood, face the risks together, overcome their differences in language and religion or nationality, and find a way to bond. Without her the men have their story, to live out, to tell, to bring back home, to tell to their wives, to recount to their children. It is like the football match, viewed at the beginning of *La Pirogue*: all male, all male bodies, all male discourse, all male adventures.

Then comes the stowaway, the grain of sand in the oyster shell to disrupt the natural growth of the adventure. When Lansana first discovers they have an extra person on board he tells Baye to stop the motor, that they have "un intrus" [an intruder]. Her disguise as a man can't be sustained for long. Nafy was caught when Lansana did a headcount their first day on the high seas.

The disruption the woman figure causes comes in her generating a new heterosexual pattern of relations that undoes the male *bonhomie* and homosociality. This is most pronounced in *La Pirogue*, although Amma's role in *Frontières* as object of desire is also immediately evoked when she first appears to them. This occurs when the group of men are rescued by the nomads, and are brought to the Arab encampment. They had just crossed the desert and Arvey had collapsed from the heat. The men had fought over whether to help him or not. As they were

struggling to go on, the Arabs on camelback showed up and rescued the group. Arriving in the encampment they walk in a file past the women and children who are playing or watching them. Standing and looking at the men is a black woman, her bushy hair uncovered, wearing a sweater and long skirt. None of the men see her. She picks up a pail, leans forward to see what was happening. The Arab *passeur* tells the men to get rid of the IDs so that they wouldn't be returned home. They burn their passports. No visa, says Joe, what good is it, and remarks that the whites had no need of visas. It's normal, says the marabout: they are tourists. The men make jokes, and Amma is then seen, again, walking by and staring at them. Their postures in a circle conveys their camaraderie. The Arab man rises and tells them now they can take new names, Mohammed, Djibril, or Gunther, Jean-Pierre, Platini – it's all the same. Their new life awaits them. The Arab walks off; Sippi turns and sees Amma. His response is immediate: "Ooh, la la," he says. The circle turns, and is broken. Sippi says, sometimes it is better to be blind. The school-teacher then intones, "Love, Love, when we are under your spell, then we can say, adieu prudence." Aside, the Arab man reaches for Amma, and in the scene that follows she negotiates to go on with the others at the price of having sex with him then and there in the sand. From that point on, we see her with the others, now part of the band. Her head covered in a scarf, she forms an attachment with Sippi. The journey now is shaped by her struggle to form a new relationship with him, as the others become either rivals or indifferent. She finds her protector with whom to establish a new "belonging."

In *La Pirogue*, the female character Nafy's protector is Kaba. Like Amma, Nafy is already married when Kaba playfully wags his finger at her at the water fountain in Dakar before they departed, and told her that she would become his wife one day. But they are merely playing at that point. When she is discovered on board, the day after their departure by sea, the viewers are as surprised as Lansana, the *passeur*. Her relationship with Kaba is to be developed on board the pirogue, not before. The rivalry begins as Lansana discovers her and asks Nafy who aided her in getting on board. She answers, no one, and he accuses her of lying – a woman manifestly couldn't have managed on her own. When she denies it, he then accuses Kaba. Their rivalry commences from that point as each man courts her in the course of the voyage, despite her being married, like Amma, and having two children. When Lansana tells her, you pay immediately or else we throw you in the water, Kaba tells Lansana he is crazy. She admits she has no money. When another asks what is to be done about the apportioning out of rations, Kaba says he will share with her. As the dispute accelerates Baye intervenes, asking if she can pay after they arrive; she says she has a connection and work awaiting her in Paris. Lansana begrudgingly accepts the arrangement, telling her she will cook for everyone else. The disrupted order is gingerly restored. She thus becomes a servant to the men in the "cargo," who have paid their fares and are customers.

Later Lansana approaches Nafy, and she rebuffs him. For the remainder of the voyage, Kaba and Lansana remain rivals, although it is ultimately pointless as Kaba is swept overboard in a storm, and Lansana dies with most of the others after they have drifted for many days. Nafy survives and is the only one strong enough to call out to the Red Cross helicopter for help. In the end the voyage has run aground, and she, like all the passengers, is helplessly repatriated.

c. The sirens' call and the call from home

In the Road Movie genre travelers must face dangers so that they might become more than what they were when they departed, so that they might be able to return having conquered their infirmities, be better prepared to repair the wounded world they had left.

But the journey of the migrant can be long. In *The Odyssey* twenty years pass before Odysseus returns at the end, to find Penelope had waited faithfully, that his son had grown into a man, and not forgotten his father. This reunion came only after Odysseus had met with Circe, the Sirens, had his adventure to the full with Calypso for seven years, and finally with the virgin Nausicaa. The challenges of the sirens' call could not be resisted by Odysseus's men, and even he, the great hero, had to be restrained by ropes lest he fall into the temptation and die.

Home calls the migrant in Sissako's *La vie sur terre*, leading Dramen to leave Paris at the time of New Year's, and to return to his father and their hometown in Mali, leaving behind all his sophisticated life and western clothes, and resuming the simpler rhythms of life in the village. In many other films, the sirens' call of Europe also proves illusory, as in Absa's *Ainsi meurent les anges*, or Sissako's *Heremakono*, where the work and money in Europe fail to dampen the desire to return home. When the voyagers set out, all they can hear is the beat of the global drum that calls them to tempt their fate and to take the path north. But when the bubble of the dream is burst, when the storm overtakes the pirogue, destroying its rations, water, gas, and motor, there is nothing left but the memory of home, and each of the survivors remembers and repents the decision to leave.

In the iconography of West Africa, there is one image that encapsulates best that image of home, and that is the baobab tree. Sissako utilizes its exfoliating branches at the beginning of *La vie sur terre* to evoke the powerful pull of Africa on Drame, who buys his presents in the supermarket of Paris and leaves for home. On the pirogue there is no longer any opportunity for the voyagers to return. So they re-enter through the portals of fantasy, and dream of home. Most movingly, it is the elder Samba, who led the men from his village on this deadly trip, whose village had put all their resources into paying for their travel, all their hopes for a better future into their success in finding work in the fields of Andalusia, who twice dreams of the baobab.

d. The challenge of the stranded pirogue and the storm

Both of Samba's dreams in *La Pirogue* come after the men of the pirogue face great challenges, and fail to overcome them. The first comes following the discovery of Nafy and after the men have burned their passports. The voyage seems to be settling into its routines for the men when another pirogue is sighted at a distance. As they approach, they discover that the others are in distress, with no water, food, or gas. They approach, and the people on the other ship begin to jump into the water and swim for them. Abou, the young impulsive musician dives into the water to try to help, but he himself can't swim, and has to be rescued by Baye, who then orders Kaba to steer the boat away from the other pirogue, abandoning the others to their deaths. Later they will find themselves in the same precarious state after the storm has destroyed all their stores and fuel.

After each disaster, abandoning the others, being abandoned by fate and by Allah, they turn to their own separate thoughts, somber in the contemplation of death. Samba closes his eyes, and the image vacillates. He hears the sounds of the savannah, the singing in the village – home! And in the center of the image is the baobab as it stands majestic in his mind’s eye. As the camera approaches the tree, we enter into its space, almost into its interior, with its great trunk opening a cleft for the camera’s eye. There, tradition would have it, reside the spirits from a time before Islam or Christianity had made their inroads into people’s beliefs. In his vision Samba would seem to reattach the African interlocutor to home, to reknit the ties of belonging. But the illusion is lost, and he wakes to find himself on a boat that has just left another group of Africans to die on the sea.

The second time he dreams of the tree, it is after the storm has hit and the voyagers are under great duress. A group of the men try to throw Nafy overboard, fearing that she is unlucky, or worse, a witch. She cries out and is saved, but the men can no longer imagine that they have anything left of a common community – only a common fate. On board Christians from Guinea, close to animists in the eyes of the Muslims from Senegal, had yielded to their fears, and attempted to sacrifice her. A fight breaks out between the men. Samba indignantly states, these imbeciles say she brings misfortune. Shortly after that Baye discovers that his bottle, containing their blessings for the voyage is missing, taken by the Guineans. Nothing remains of home to help them to survive. In the scenes that follow, the travelers begin to die, one after another. The storm had made manifest what was already being broken – the ties of home that had made it possible to face hard times together.

After the storm, Samba dreams again of the baobab. The loss of the motor and the sail meant that the boat could only drift. The morning after the storm Samba sits upright on one of the planks, Baye tries to fix the motor. The sound of Senegalese singing comes up. The men are down in the hold, and Samba tries to steady himself as the boat rocks. But his mind slips into reverie with the music, and the baobab



Figure 27.2 The great baobab tree from *La Pirogue*.

Source: Screenshots from Film DVD. *La Pirogue*: 2012. Director: Moussa Traore,
Production companies: Les Chauves-Souris, Arte France Cinéma, Astou Films.

reappears in its majesty. This time the image is followed by a herd of cattle walking toward Samba. Cattle are the heart of the Fulani's culture. They fade in and out of focus, only to disappear as one of the Guinean travelers grabs hold of Baye, the captain who has now failed to bring his cargo home safely.

e. The return

Like *Frontières*, *La Pirogue* ends with the remnant of passengers rescued by the Spanish Red Cross. They are shipped back to Dakar, bereft of their dreams. The survivors lost their money; Baye, the captain, lost the boat, and most of those who put their lives in his hands. There is no joy at their return.

For the survivors, however, the voyage did lead to changes in their lives. Before the journey Baye, the pater familias, could no longer earn money for his family because the great global trawlers had harvested most of the fish off the coast. When Baye tries to argue Kaba out of going, Kaba points to the horizon, saying, now there is nothing for us. When he tries to argue back against the pirogue owner Bourbi, who is asking him to captain the pirogue, Bourbi asks, how much have you earned fishing in three days? He has no answer.

At home, he has the love of his wife Kine and his son, but Abou, the young man who lives with them, refuses to address him with respect, mocks his ignorance about what Abou's iPhone is, and tells him that he is leaving on the pirogue despite Baye. Abou is the prototypical irresponsible young musician. The siren call for him is life up north where he can make money from his talent, and where he will not have to put up with the irritating pressures of home. He is Telemachus before Odysseus departs, the rebellious son who can barely put up with his father.

All that changes when Baye saves his life after he jumped into the water to rescue the stranded voyagers from the other pirogue. Kaba is lost at sea; Lansana dies, along with most of the others, but Abou says to Baye, after the devastation of the storm and the despair of the passengers, we will get through this. They return together to the waiting "Penelope," to Kine and home, presumably prepared now to face the ravages of what globalization has done to life in Senegal. The impediments to belonging might seem to have passed with their return, and if it is ironic that Baye buys his son a Barca jersey from the street merchant in Dakar, it can also be read in an opposite way: he needn't have gone to Europe to find this souvenir. It was already there, at home, where life might be more difficult, but where a family waited for him so as to have a life together – where he "belonged." The sirens were silenced – at least for the moment.

CONCLUSION

The end of the journey in the three films we tracked entailed the death of most of those who undertook the perilous venture. The films dramatize the larger global upheaval that has seen many millions of people become internally displaced or refugees in neighboring countries. In the films presented above, migrants desperately sought a new life abroad. The story continues. While I have focused on the journey, the struggles faced by migrants on their safe arrival have only continued, and again have been given form in a number of powerful films.²³ While in earlier years

some of the migrants traveled without such dangers, and opted to return (*Ainsi meurent les anges*,²⁴ and *Les noms n'habitent nulle part*),²⁵ many have remained in Europe, facing xenophobia and now the rising tides of rightwing political parties. This “journey” from home, from life as part of an autochthonous population who regarded their indigeneity as conferring rights of citizenship and property, has led them to the opposite pole of ownership where xenophobic political movements have increasingly focused on the term “illegal” as designating not only actions, but people. They were fragile cargo, assimilated with disposable wealth, and became imperiled people whose humanity was disparaged and who experienced the limits of dispossession.

The journey of precarity, marking growing numbers of immigrants into Europe, has become known to the world through headline news accounts that continue today. But the stories of their lives have required a more dramatic form, and the films that have emerged now constitute the new genre dealing with their lives. Those films will circulate, like the people whose experiences they have registered, and will become the announcements for a global flow that began with capital's occult force and ended with death or, for the lucky ones, life as survivors in a new homeland.

ENDNOTES

1. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/23/world/europe/european-union-ministers-migrants-refugees.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=photo-spot-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news>
2. When regarding migrants from the perspective of countries they are attempting to come to, they are immigrants; from the perspective of countries they are leaving, they are emigrants; when leaving one country to enter another, they are migrants, and when fleeing oppression and seeking asylum, they are refugees. This paper will deal primarily with those leaving home and seeking a new country to live and work in: they are migrants.
3. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/05/world/treatment-of-migrants-evokes-memories-of-europes-darkest-hour.html?smid=tw-nytimesworld&smtyp=cur>
4. When Libya, one of the oil giants in the Mediterranean, collapsed, the fallout of the conflict led to the flight of the Tuaregs south, with heavily armed militias who had served in Qaddafi's own forces. They invaded and conquered most of Mali, before being driven back by a coalition of Malian army and French troops.
5. Some of the sources for information about these conflicts include Fabrice Weissman, *In the Shadow of 'Just Wars': Violence, Politics, and Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Gerard Prunier, *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); African Rights (Organization), *Rwanda: Death, Despair, and Defiance* (London: African Rights, 1995); René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Alison Desforges, *Leave None to Tell the Story* (New York: Human Rights Watch; Paris: International Federation of Human Rights, 2004, c1999); and country reports by The International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and IRIN.
6. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).
7. *Ibid.*, 15–16.
8. Peter Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa and Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

9. North Africans were sought by the French, and Asian and Caribbean subjects of the Empire were brought in to Great Britain. Male worker residences were constructed, and eventually families were allowed to be reunited as the immigrant populations grew.
10. *Avengers: Age of Ultron* cost \$280 million and garnered \$1.4 billion worldwide (roughly the budget of Benin, and twice that of the Democratic Republic of the Congo). Even more extravagant, *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* cost a spectacular \$378.5 million, while the *Hobbit* trilogy altogether cost \$623 million. Such vast sums were incalculable when viewed from the street level of the average Global South resident whose access to the untold riches of the north seemed unreachable.
11. BBC report of supercargo ships: "What is blue, a quarter of a mile long, and taller than London's Olympic stadium? The answer – this year's [2013] new class of container ship, the Triple E. When it goes into service this June, it will be the largest vessel ploughing the sea. Each will contain as much steel as eight Eiffel Towers and have a capacity equivalent to 18,000 20-foot containers (TEU). If those containers were placed in Times Square in New York, they would rise above billboards, streetlights and some buildings. Or, to put it another way, they would fill more than 30 trains, each a mile long and stacked two containers high. Inside those containers, you could fit 36,000 cars or 863 million tins of baked beans." <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-21432226>
12. Comaroff and Comaroff, *Millennial Capitalism*, 24.
13. *Ibid.*, 24.
14. In July of 2015 *Libération* ran a brilliant series of articles on the traffic of transporters, *passeurs*, from Calais to Dover, detailing the varied kinds of transport available to the migrants, and their cost. See http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2015/08/17/migrants-les-tours-de-passe-passe-des-passeurs_1364952
15. Peter Geschiere and Francis Nyamnjoh, "Capitalism and Autochthony." In *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, ed. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 159–190.
16. Cyprian Fisiy and Peter Geschiere, "Development and Paranoia in Cameroon." In *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft, and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders (London: Routledge, 2001), 242.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging*.
19. Fisiy and Geschiere, "Development and Paranoia in Cameroon," 243.
20. Mostefa Djadjam, the Algerian filmmaker who made *Frontieres*, was one of the first to detail the long and dangerous voyage from sub-Saharan Africa to Morocco, ending with the attempt to cross into Spain. He takes the viewer into an experience that grew exponentially in the first decade and a half of the 21st century. In *Bamako* the Malian-Mauretanian director Abderrahmane Sissako responds strongly to the World Bank's policies that resulted in Africa's indebtedness, and harmed the economies of African states to the point where many of the youth began to undertake the dangerous trips north. The film is set in a quartier of Bamako where a mock trial of the World Bank is enacted. Finally, *La Pirogue*, made by the Senegalese Moussa Toure, endeavors to represent how a group of West Africans would dare to take a pirogue out onto the open sea to cross to the Canaries, again a common occurrence from the beaches of Senegal and Mauretania, especially in the first decade of the 21st century. The three films give a full picture of the migrant's voyage and how death marked its outcomes often.
21. <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/writers.html>, accessed May 3, 2016.
22. One of the key taglines from the film is, "It's not like before; now the slaves pay for their own transportation" – stated by Sippi, as the Arabs threaten them when they object to their fees being raised.

23. E.g., Steven Frears's *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002).
24. Moussa Sene Absa, 2001.
25. Dominique Loreau, 1994.

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CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

BOUTIQUE ETHNICITY

On African Ancestry and neoliberal economies of the self



David Bering-Porter

African Ancestry is the concept that guides this chapter. It is an idea designating a certain history and a certain ancestry, as they come together to form a personal identity. However, it is also a corporate identity for the company *African Ancestry, Inc.*, a direct-to-consumer (DTC) genetics company whose client-base consists almost exclusively of African-Americans. The aim of this essay is to explore the intersection between these two dimensions of African Ancestry, and in both cases this phrase helps us to understand how a certain vision of the past is constructed over a history that has otherwise been obscured by the history of race and, in particular, of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As a concept and as a company, *African Ancestry, Inc.* claims to offer a set of tools that fill these gaps in African-American history, all the while framing the personal discovery of ethnic history and identity as a necessary intellectual labor to be carried out on the self. On the one hand, African Ancestry seems to flesh out the gaps in African-American history left blank by the traumas of the colonial period and it does so by promising a new knowledge of family history and ethnic identity that are “empowering.” On the other hand, this notion reframes and reifies identity and ethnicity within an essentialist genetic paradigm, making ethnicity itself a tool for subjection that is a necessary part of imagining and constructing who we “really” are. This chapter argues that the practice of DTC genetics screening operates under a paradigm of self-care that expresses itself through various regimes of government, expression, and value, and that this version of a “boutique” ethnicity belongs to a practice of genetic self-fashioning that exists at the heart of neoliberal economies of the self.

This chapter takes seriously the relation between these two points of view and it seeks to understand the conditions under which blackness can be made both modular and marketable, as something that can be owned and commodified. It takes ethnic identity as something that no longer exists solely under a repressive regime of a history of slavery and colonialism but rather, increasingly, as something that exists as part of a neoliberal strategy of government and political economy. To understand this idea more clearly, I turn from art to the intersection of science and industry where genetic screening services offer new insights into who and what we are by decoding the individual genome.

In 2001, the artist and performer Keith Obadike put his blackness up for sale on the online auction house eBay. The auction ran for four days until eBay shut it down, flagging the content as “inappropriate,” but in the 96 hours that this signifier for Obadike’s race was on the auction block, it received 12 bids and reached a price of \$152.50.¹ The project, called *Blackness for Sale*, was conceived of as a piece of digital performance art illustrating the complex facets of racial being and belonging. It did this by imagining race not as something that was essential to who and what Obadike was, but rather as something that Obadike owned. Obadike’s “blackness” was translated from a language of ontology into a language of the marketplace, where it was described in terms of the potential benefits and warnings of ownership. *Blackness for Sale* imagined race as if it were easily appropriated; a network of racial and epidermal signification that could be put on and taken off like a leather jacket. Ownership of this blackness came with certain rights and privileges, costs and benefits. The piece suggested that the potential buyer could now openly laugh at racially sensitive jokes, could employ racial slurs and colloquialisms with impunity, and that it could be worn to avoid the public scrutiny that so often comes with interracial dating.² Obadike’s blackness might even be used to take advantage of affirmative action for employment or college admissions but the description warns that this might be a “limited time offer.”³ Conversely, this blackness came with some warnings. One should not, Obadike suggests, use this blackness while shopping at an upscale department store; one should not attempt to use it while voting (especially in certain states); and one should, of course, most certainly not use this blackness when dealing with the police.

As a piece of art, Obadike’s project could be viewed in a tongue-in-cheek fashion. Clearly, one’s skin, one’s personal experience, and one’s history – all facets of what constitutes race and racial experience – cannot be so easily bought and sold. Just as clearly, no actual object could be sent to some imagined winner of the auction. The piece is striking nonetheless because it exposes the ease with which the idea of race and of blackness, in particular, is translated into the terms of economy and commodities. In the list of costs and benefits, Obadike framed a contemporary experience of blackness as though it were a commodity and, in so doing, he also revealed the way that racial signification is haunted by its connection to the market. If the tone of the piece is matter-of-fact, this flatness of affect belies a historical trauma in which blackness has actually been a signifier for salability within the context of slavery, and with it a host of more sinister connotations that follow the commodification of the black body.

Obadike’s description is evocative of Franz Fanon’s discussion of his own experience of being a black body. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon describes and defines blackness as an unstable signifier that seems to slip and hang off of his person like an ill-fitting coat, doubling and tripling his presence in the world through a series of imposed histories and visual relations. Fanon describes this experience as “negating” in a way that pushes him outside of himself, as an alienating experience of being “an image in the third person.”⁴ Fanon’s description of this experience suggests that a subjective triangulation takes place, between his own position in the world and the imposed and emplaced versions of himself that are pushed on him by others. He is displaced, pushed into a state of constantly relating to himself from the outside. He feels himself not simply as a subject, but as an object.

Fanon's phenomenological triangulation of race, history, and identity is useful because it prefigures the dynamics of identity that take place within the rhetoric of DTC genetics companies like *African Ancestry, Inc.* Similarly, Fanon's discussion of black identity shares a language of alienation with the commodities and commodification that Obadike uses to describe the blackness for sale in his auction. The "fact" of blackness, as it is thought by Fanon and illustrated by Obadike, is at the intersection of history and experience. It frames the complexities of an identity that is not entirely identical with itself.⁵ The embodied experience of blackness begins to collapse under the weight of what Fanon describes as "historicity," and, in its place, individual experience gives way "to an epidermal racial schema" that seems to envelope the body.⁶ Fanon explores this, saying, "I was responsible not only for my body but also for my race and my ancestors. I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders" and so on.⁷ This lived experience, shared by both Fanon and Obadike under the sign of blackness, has a common position in the world. While Fanon's writing conveys the alienation of a subject forced to perceive himself as an object, Obadike's auction house description frames the same experience in the similarly alienated language of the modular commodity – of a self where blackness is not an essence but a feature.

African Ancestry, Inc. is a DTC genetics screening company that specializes in testing the human genome for sequences of DNA that can be traced back to populations currently living in one of the 56 countries of the African continent. Unlike other DTC genetics companies, such as *23andMe* or *Family Tree DNA* whose ancestry testing is global in scope, *African Ancestry, Inc.* targets their services to African-Americans and other members of the African Diaspora so as to help them fill in the missing history erased by the violence of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The company was founded in 2003, shortly after the completion of the Human Genome Project (HGP), which had recently mapped a single human genetic code in its entirety for the first time in history. Following this, the promise and potential of genetics seemed to know no bounds and after the completion of the HGP, several companies were founded in order to bring the knowledge and access of the human genome directly to the consumer.

The services offered by DTC genetics companies fall into two connected categories. The first of these screens the individual genome for sequences of the genetic code that are known or suspected to correlate with certain diseases and medical conditions.⁸ The screening process highlights the risk of developing a disease based on the SNPs present in their customer's genome, which is rarely a guarantee that such a disease will actually manifest, meaning that the business model of genetic health assessment is a matter of determining risk and then offering suggestions to help mitigate the potential for disease.⁹ The second, related, service offered by the typical DTC genetics company is ancestry testing, which looks for correlations between a customer's genetic code and a population elsewhere in the world that shares a significant number of genetic sequences. By comparing an individual's genome with genotypes sampled from populations around the world, it could be determined with some statistical accuracy that one's ancestors once came from northern Europe and/or western Africa, although this geographical information would be approximate. *African Ancestry, Inc.* focuses exclusively on the second aspect of the DTC genetics business, specializing in tracing the genetic roots of African-Americans.¹⁰

Ever since the television series *Roots* aired in 1977, a certain problem of African Ancestry has been posed within the public imagination.¹¹ Unlike their European-American counterparts, African-Americans have not had access to their own family history and genealogy. The trans-Atlantic slave trade insured that most African-Americans could only begin their family history in the U.S. upon their ancestor's unhappy arrival in the new world, where bills of sale, ship's manifests, and property listings were often the only indicators of where and when a black ancestor might have originated. The trauma of slavery in the Americas effectively erased the collective history of African-Americans, making it nearly impossible to truly know the ethnic and geographical origins of one's ancestors beyond the hazy figure of the African continent. The success of *Roots*, and the novel by Alex Haley upon which it was based, was precisely that it constructed a likely narrative behind African-American genealogy, a collective story of slavery and, eventually, emancipation in America.

African Ancestry, Inc. inserts itself into this narrative and frames the processes of genetic screening and genealogy testing as actions that are emancipatory and empowering and envisioning itself as an intermediary that can "find the African in your American."¹² The company asserts that

[m]ost companies can only tell you what continent you originated from, but not what country. With the industry's largest and most comprehensive database of over 30,000 indigenous African samples, African Ancestry determines specific countries and – more often than not – specific ethnic groups of origin with an unrivaled level of detail, accuracy, and confidence.¹³

This claim lies at the heart of how *African Ancestry, Inc.* views itself, i.e. not simply as a purveyor of genetic information, but an integral part of a narrative of self-discovery that leads to a new chapter of African-American identity. What *African Ancestry, Inc.* is selling has less to do with scientific information about the customer's genetic makeup and more do to with fashioning an identity that is only accessible through the intermediary of the company, which has the ability to unlock one's history by decoding one's DNA. Evidence for this abounds throughout the discourse on company's website, which serves as its public face and is symptomatic of their investment in selling identity.

African Ancestry, Inc. produces a number of promotional videos that range from frequently asked questions, answered by one of the co-founders and screened on the company's private YouTube channel, to videos describing the various services that the company offers.¹⁴ Because of the somewhat esoteric nature of the company's product, these videos provide an important window into the ways in which *African Ancestry, Inc.* situates itself. The promotional video *Do You Know Where You're From?* helps to illustrate just how the company frames itself as a benevolent intermediary between the customer and her genetic data.¹⁵ The video stages a direct comparison between the ancestral ties of European-Americans, and other ethnic groups, and African-American ancestry in order to highlight the problem: a genuine lack of knowledge about where in Africa one's ancestor might have come from. While this seems like a reasonable enough problem to address through genetic testing, the discourse within the remainder of the video, ostensibly outlining the benefits of ancestry testing, reveals a set of interests that are not limited to genetic genealogy.

The language of the video frames this genetic genealogy as more than a project of historical redress, of giving African-Americans back a history that has been taken away by the violence inflicted upon their ancestors, but as a way of constructing an authentic ethnic identity. The rest of the video leaves behind the pretense of documentary produced by the staged conversations that take place at the beginning in favor of the direct address of an advertisement, and the language employed by the company is worth quoting in full:

African Ancestry has freed more than thirty-thousand families over the last nine years by giving them a part of history they thought would forever be lost. Just one sample test can unlock the *power* of knowing for you and your family for generations to come. The benefits are invaluable. You'll find out what country and possibly even what ethnic group you're a descendent of. Define a sense of cultural identity for you and your kids. Solidify a true connection to the motherland. Determine the roots of your family tree at this year's reunion. Acquire a new sense of pride. Leave behind a legacy. Know who you are. There are fifty-six countries in Africa, find out where you're from today.¹⁶

Immediately striking is the way that notions like freedom and empowerment are deployed in the video to describe the importance of the services offered by the company. *African Ancestry, Inc.* has "freed" thousands by providing them information about their ancestral geography, yet it is never made quite clear what they are now free from, or how the ignorance of their past was keeping these families in a state of informational bondage. Similarly excessive rhetoric is used to emphasize the "power" of the knowledge granted by the genetic test, whose results and benefits are "invaluable."¹⁷ What these terms – freedom, power, and value – have in common is that they are all a part of a language of the market. The genetically situated knowledge of one's ancestral geography becomes a byproduct of the thing that the company is actually selling: an authentic, ethnic identity that is essential to a strong and healthy sense of self. What the video highlights is a subtle slippage in the discourse of the company from genetics and ancestry towards an authentic identity – that ethnicity is not simply an essential part of this identity, but a valuable supplement to it. An identity "freed" from the history of western colonialism and the slave trade.

After the customer's genetic code has been sequenced and analyzed, a packet containing the results of the test is returned.¹⁸ This packet contains information about which present-day African country, and possibly which ethnic group, currently contains a population with which the customer shares a significant amount of ancestry. The packet includes a "certificate of ancestry" naming the customer and the modern-day country to which her ancestry has been ascribed in a document reminiscent of a diploma or professional certification.¹⁹ Beyond the claims of genetics, knowledge, and history made by these test, the certificate of ancestry reveals the excessiveness of the claims made by the company and the strange slippage of meaning between the actuality of colonial history and the discourse of self-making and self-understanding that seems, in fact, to be the central feature of what the company is selling.

In an article exploring the way that genetic testing works in certain ethnic communities, Alondra Nelson makes reference to a version of history that she describes as the "usable past."²⁰ Nelson engages in an ethnographic study of individuals who have

used genetic testing as a part of their family genealogy in order to explore how the science of genetics has affected the collective understanding of race. Nelson is particularly interested in how genetics affects ethnic identity for people of color. What she discovers is that while genetic genealogy testing rarely yields surprising results, the most effective “test outcomes are those that offer test-takers a *usable* past,” in other words, a history that is useful in the construction of a personal or family narrative.²¹ The “usable past” is one that connects with networks of meaning and narrative that serve as a frame work for the customer’s personal identity, although Nelson points out that these tests are taken with a proverbial grain of salt insofar as many of the participants are actually aware of the limitations of genetic testing.²² Nevertheless, Nelson suggests that genetic genealogy testing is an important part of the changing terrain of race and ethnic belonging that fosters a phenomena she describes as “affiliative self-fashioning.”²³

Extending a notion of “objective self-fashioning” from the medical anthropologist Joseph Dumit, Nelson argues for an “affiliative self-fashioning” that speaks to the way that “roots-seekers” use genetic knowledge to fill in the gaps in their family history in such a way as to attend to the “weight of individual desires for relatedness.”²⁴ This desire is precisely what the promotional materials from *African Ancestry, Inc.* tap into in order to sell their services, and part of what the company is really selling is both the idea of a healthy and complete and an idea of Africa itself. As much as the “usable past” that Nelson describes can be used by individuals to re-imagine their family history, it also suggests a history that is malleable, one that is subject to the desires of the individual and the drives of the corporate intermediary that provides this new genetic information and frames it for consumption.²⁵

The “usable past” that companies like *African Ancestry, Inc.* attempt to create comes at the expense of a clear understanding of the actual past in question. Take for example, the certificate of ancestry offered by *African Ancestry, Inc.* Nelson looks to this “usable past” as a way for the individual subject to gain some feeling of agency in relation to his or her family history and takes it to be a central feature of the process of affiliation that is part of the fashioning of the self.²⁶ This would certainly be in line with the rhetoric employed by the company, which frames genetic genealogy testing as an empowering act undertaken by the individual. This claim for an authentic relation to the past is central to *African Ancestry, Inc.*’s image and success as a company and, indeed, the idea that somewhere inside each individual’s genome, every bit of lost history can be recovered and restored is a compelling concept. However, while making the connection between historical geographies and present-day countries might be scientifically possible, it is historically naïve.

Africa was the site of one of the most concerted efforts of European colonialism and by the time of its height in the late nineteenth century, most of the continent had been divided according to the imperial and geo-political interests of the European colonial powers. To effectively authenticate an individual’s ancestral connection to a present-day African country is simultaneously to cover up this history of colonialism, which is entirely responsible for the national boundaries of postcolonial Africa. As Saadia Touval points out, “The partition of Africa and the delimitation of its borders are generally considered to be arbitrary acts, imposed by the European powers without reference to local conditions.”²⁷ These “local conditions” include the ethnic groups already living in the area before the influx of colonial expansion. In their rush

to control the resource-rich lands of the African continent, colonial powers drew national boundaries to suit their own interests and this took place, as John Ravenhill points out, “with little or no respect for preexisting social and political groupings or even, sometimes, for ‘natural’ geographical features.”²⁸ Quoting Lord Salisbury, the British Secretary of State for India in the nineteenth century, Adekunle Ajala points out, “we have been giving away mountains and rivers and lakes to each other, only hindered by the small impediment that we never knew exactly where the mountains and rivers and lakes were.”²⁹ What these quotations make clear is that the national borders of present-day African countries say very little about the places where the enslaved ancestors of African-Americans might have come from. This is especially true because the time frame from which *African Ancestry, Inc.* looks for its shared sequences is explicitly stated as coming from before the trans-Atlantic slave trade, somewhere between 500 and 2,000 years ago.³⁰

How, then, are the claims of ethnic and national authenticity made by *African Ancestry, Inc.* to be evaluated? Customers are not only given certificates of ancestry with the name of a present-day African country printed on it, but the company’s online store is full of t-shirts, bags, and other materials with the names of these African countries proudly emblazoned on them in colorful red, black, and green.³¹ By presenting the customer with a certificate that ostensibly authenticates their ethnicity and ancestral nationality, *African Ancestry, Inc.* is not helping their customers to better understand the history that produced them – this would necessarily involve understanding the complex relations of colonial and postcolonial relations, which are almost never mentioned in the company’s materials – rather, the company is doing the opposite. It is whitewashing the actual history of slavery and colonialism that is at the root of the African Diaspora by replacing the political with the personal. If the actuality of colonial history is being erased and covered over by the discourse produced by *African Ancestry, Inc.*, then what has been deployed in its stead? What is it that covers over and parasitizes this history? *African Ancestry, Inc.* belongs to a larger shift in the way that ethnicity is thought, which has moved away from the (often) troubled and troubling history of race and colonialism towards a practice of genetic self-fashioning and boutique ethnicity.

While Nelson is circumspect in attributing too much agency to the discursive and ideological forces that take part in structuring how race is imagined in genetic science, and she is careful to recognize that “roots-seekers” are not simple pawns in an all-encompassing system, she does point out that we must be cautious about this new genetic vision of ethnicity. Describing the genome as an ideological “iron cage,” Nelson argues that the feelings of agency and empowerment offered by these genetic testing services may “come at the cost of acquiescence to a classificatory logic of human types,” meaning that the acquisition of ancestral knowledge is, at the same time, acceptance of an essentializing idea of race itself.³² Nelson artfully points to the way that genetic science has functioned to reify the notion of race in the twenty-first century more than to emancipate us from it.

The affiliative self-fashioning that Nelson describes is, in the end, limiting in its ability to provide agency but the versions of self and subjectivity that circulate in the discourse surrounding genetic genealogy testing are symptomatic of some larger shifts taking place around the ideas of race and ethnicity. Instead, what we see in the exemplary case of African Ancestry is a mode of self-fashioning based in and on

genetics, which takes the genome as both a key and a model. Like the genome, the genetic self is a vision of the subject that is modular and informational, not unlike the genome itself. This is a vision of the self where ethnicity is not something that one is born into but is instead something that is bought into. It is this version or vision of race of what I am calling a “boutique ethnicity” that has been taken up by *African Ancestry, Inc.*, but is hardly an idea exclusive to them. Rather, *African Ancestry, Inc.* provides a symptomatic example of larger shifts in the notion of race and ethnic identity, one that makes ethnicity into a key part of self-making and subjectification.³³

The notion of boutique ethnicity brings into focus the shifting terrain of race in the genomic age. As an institution of colonialism, race functioned as a repressive technology of social domination. Under these conditions, race became an essential and defining feature of the individual and it was given legitimacy through an increasingly scientific discourse that spoke of race in the language of ontology. More recently, race has come to be re-imagined not as an essential flaw, but as a feature and nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the practices of genealogy and genetic self-fashioning, where the drive to seek out one’s ancestry becomes an integral part of the subject’s journey of self discovery and self-empowerment. Broadly speaking, boutique ethnicity is not exclusive to African-Americans or to *African Ancestry, Inc.*, but appears wherever ethnicity functions as a kind of “value-added” aspect of the subject. Examples of boutique ethnicity abound. Aside from the examples provided by *African Ancestry, Inc.*’s online gift shop, one needs only consider the branding of nationality such as in the case of “Irish-ness,” which is the necessary conceptual precondition for the nationalist goods for sale in Irish pubs throughout the U.S., the volumes of St. Patrick’s Day merchandise on sale in advance of the official holiday, and the Irish ancestry tours that offer to take decedents of Irish immigrants back to their roots.³⁴

Boutique ethnicity signifies the commodification and branding of ethnic identity and the valorization of these ethnic markers in order to effectively make a marketplace of and around the self. As a phenomena, boutique ethnicity reframes the discourse of ethnicity from an idea grounded in questions of history, culture, and power, and moves it towards a practice of self-fashioning, self-improvement, and self-affirmation that is rooted in an economic strategy. Just as ethnicity was sold as a commodity in Keith Obadike’s *Blackness for Sale*, boutique ethnicity re-imagines race as a valuable feature of a subjectivity that is modular, like the kind of subject that is generated in the process of genetic self-fashioning.

The ways that race and ethnicity are being inscribed into a language of economy has also been noted in the work of John and Jean Comaroff, who have written about the incorporation of race and ethnic identity into the political-economy of neoliberalism. In their book, *Ethnicity, Inc.*, the Comaroffs argue that “something strange is happening to the thing we call ‘ethnicity,’ the taken-for-granted species of collective subjectivity that lies at the intersection of identity and culture.”³⁵ They argue that this shift in recent understandings of ethnicity has to do with a reconceptualization of identity as a kind of property, in other words as the type of object that can be owned both by a collective or community and by individuals directly.

Drawing on ethnographic research, the Comaroffs illustrate how indigenous populations are capitalizing on their ethnicity and cultural heritage, effectively transforming traditional actions and objects into commodities with a market value. They

use the term “Ethnicity, Inc.” in order to illustrate the corporatization of ethnic identity and, like Nelson, they see the economic investment in ethnicity and identity as inherently contradictory, at once reifying and essentializing race and, at the same time, casting it as matter of voluntary affiliation. Speculating about the future of ethnicity in the neoliberal era, the Comaroffs propose that recent arguments for ethnic ownership present ethnicity in two, contradictory ways:

In its *lived* manifestations, cultural identity appears ever more as two antithetical things at once: on the one hand, as a precipitate of inalienable natural essence, of genetics and biology, and on the other, as a function of voluntary self-fashioning, often through serial acts of consumption. It is, in other words, *both* ascriptive and instrumental. *Both* innate and constructed. *Both* blood and choice.³⁶

Rather than imagining that these two contradictory directions are simply tearing the notion of ethnicity apart, it is worth asking: what is the function of a version of ethnicity that exists in these two, contradictory states at once? Rather than thinking that ethnicity is becoming increasingly unstable, it is worth considering the effects that this instability is having on recent conceptions of race and how these effects might be instrumental to some larger system, such as late capitalism or neoliberalism.

In each of the formulations of ethnicity that have been explored here, the notion of fashioning comes into play in connection to a conception of the self. Nelson uses the notion of affiliative self-fashioning to describe the way that roots-seekers attempt to make use of history as a part of their own conception of self. The Comaroffs deploy a similar phrase, “voluntary self-fashioning,” which signals an act of self-creation, albeit through acts of “serial consumption.” My own contribution to this field is a notion of genetic self-fashioning and boutique ethnicity, which seeks to make explicit the importance of a modular conception of the self, one that is, itself, the site of an economy where ethnicity – as one defining characteristic of the self – becomes a valuable and valorizable commodity. Boutique ethnicity, then, is a concept that helps us think about ethnicity and identity as something to be bought or sold, like Obadike’s blackness or the sense of belonging and authenticity provided by *African Ancestry, Inc.* Boutique ethnicity speaks to a paradigm of self-fashioning as a program of demands, imperatives, and protocols levied at the individual in order to make and remake them according to the demands of a neoliberal political economy.

Neoliberalism is a much-debated term in contemporary politics and culture and is used almost interchangeably with ideas of free-market capitalism, late capitalism, and even neo-conservatism. The political theorists Manfred Steger and Ravi Roy give the following definition, suggesting that neoliberalism is something that exists as an ideology, a mode of governance, and a set of policies.³⁷ As an ideology, neoliberalism emphasizes the autonomy of the individual and the market, generally placing “the production and exchange of material goods at the heart of the human experience.”³⁸ As a mode of governance, neoliberalism seeks to foster the individual subject over the collective. As Steger and Roy point out, “[i]t celebrates individual empowerment and the devolution of central state power to smaller localized units.”³⁹ Governance in this instance refers not simply to government in power, but rather to what Michel Foucault referred to as “governmentalities,” or a social system or program concerned with stewarding a population according to a set of guiding logics or principles.

Neoliberalism is a political and economic program that serves as the driving ideological force behind contemporary globalization. Yet, as a system of governmentality, the effects of neoliberalism can be felt at the level of the individual citizen or subject and, indeed, neoliberalism's investment in the individual is a key part of its political power. As Aihwa Ong points out, neoliberalism "is reconfiguring relationships between governing and the governed, power and knowledge, and [. . .] as a new relationship between government and knowledge through which governing activities are recast as nonpolitical and nonideological problems that need technical solutions."⁴⁰ This description makes clear the neoliberal logic at the root of *African Ancestry, Inc.*'s service of genetic genealogy testing, which de-emphasizes politics and history and covers over these concepts with the non-political narrative of the journey towards apolitical emancipation and self-discovery. The discourse that *African Ancestry, Inc.* uses to sell their services shift the emphasis of ethnicity squarely away from the nation or collective and towards a practice that is exclusively geared towards a neoliberal conception of the self.

Following Ong's argument about the underlying logic of exception within a neoliberal paradigm, *African Ancestry, Inc.*'s investments in the category of the self become even more troubling. Ong asserts, "[i]t is important to trace neoliberal technology to a biopolitical mode of governing that centers on the capacity and potential of individuals and the population as living resources that may be harnessed and managed by governing regimes."⁴¹ Thus, *African Ancestry, Inc.* and the boutique conception of ethnicity that it actively promotes, might be re-thought as a part of an economic regime in which the self is instrumentalized in order to more actively produce labor and value. In this context, the self becomes not just the site of economic exchange but a technology of subjectivity itself. As Ong suggests, neoliberalism works as a kind of technology of subjectivity that relies

on an array of knowledge and expert systems to induce self-animation and self-government so that citizens can optimize choices, efficiency, and competitiveness in turbulent market conditions. Such techniques of optimization include the adherence to health regimes, acquisition of skills, development of entrepreneurial ventures, and other techniques of self-engineering and capital accumulation.⁴²

The science of genetics, where it intersects with this neoliberal logic, becomes an ideal tool for the subjectivization of the individual. DTC genetic testing – in its capacity to screen the genome for both the past (ancestors) and the future (health risks) – can be seen as an ideal neoliberal enterprise, designed to help the individual subject fashion and optimize themselves. Sarah Franklin argues that the discourse of the genetic sciences effectively instrumentalizes life itself, pointing out that, "nature becomes biology becomes genetics, through which life itself becomes reprogrammable information. This sequence proceeds along a path of increasing instrumentalization, driven by commerce, legitimated in the name of public health, and regulated by the nation-state."⁴³ *African Ancestry, Inc.* participates in this instrumental logic by emphasizing the entrepreneurial aspects of genetic self-discovery. Again, the way that the company describes the impact of their services is more telling than the science of ancestry testing itself and, as Franklin argues, this capitalization of life quite literally trades on misconceptions within the way that the discourse of genetics circulates in

what she describes as the “genetic imaginary.”⁴⁴ Franklin’s most important insight is in regards to the way in which molecular biology and genetics fits into a biopolitical paradigm that re-imagines the citizens of a nation-state into a population whose life must be fostered as a valuable resource.

In his lectures at the Collège de France from 1978–79, Foucault carefully laid out the points of connection between his own idea of biopolitics and biopower and the newly emerging system of governance known as neoliberalism. Like Steger and Roy, who borrow heavily from him, Foucault argues that neoliberalism is a system that places economics at the heart of the human experience but, more than that, it re-imagines the human as a fundamentally economic entity, concerned at the most basic and essential levels, with the “propensity to truck and barter.”⁴⁵ Foucault continues:

In neo-liberalism – and it does not hide this; it proclaims it – there is also a theory of *homo œconomicus*, but he is not at all a partner of exchange. *Homo œconomicus* is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself. This is true to the extent that, in practice, the stake in all neoliberal analyses is the replacement every time of *homo œconomicus* as partner of exchange with a *homo œconomicus* as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings.⁴⁶

What Foucault outlines is an economy of the self, one that takes the self as both the raw material of capital and the market into which neoliberal economy expands; this neoliberal economy of the self is a technology of subjectivization, a way of remaking or refashioning the individual into a neoliberal subject who exhibits the bizarre economic narcissism that has become so commonplace in today’s political landscape.

This vision of *homo œconomicus* as an entrepreneur is a crucial part of the neoliberal program of governance. It is responsible for the virtues of self-reliance touted in neoliberal circles, and also for the centrality of the self in neoliberal discourse. Entrepreneurial *homo œconomicus* is told to find value in himself or herself and to valorize those characteristics. But part of the danger in making the subject into an entrepreneur of the self, and of framing the self as a kind of marketplace, is that the market is the site of risk. Foucault defines this vision of the individual subject under biopolitics as “human capital” and points out that genetics provides a language for the quantification of this version of the individual as a neoliberal enterprise.⁴⁷ But the dangers of this are not simply its proximity to eugenics, which Foucault also considers, but by framing the self as fundamentally entrepreneurial it becomes like any other market, subject to invisible market forces that need no outside intervention.

The French sociologists Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval follow the line of Foucault’s thinking and argue that the entrepreneurial subject is actually a key facet of neoliberal discourse that not only valorizes the self, but also puts it at risk. As Dardot and Laval point out, this new, neoliberal subject is “regarded as the possessor of ‘human capital’ – a capital to be accumulated through enlightened choices that are the fruit of responsible calculation of costs and benefits.”⁴⁸ This vision of entrepreneurial

life is one in which the very existence of the self is viewed as an economic endeavor with the possible benefits as well as the associated risks. Thus,

the distribution of economic resources and social positions is exclusively regarded as the consequence of trajectories, successful or otherwise, of personal realization. The entrepreneurial subject is exposed in all areas of life to vital risks from which he cannot extricate himself, their management being a matter of strictly private decisions. To be a personal enterprise assumes living entirely in *risk*.⁴⁹

Under neoliberalism, managing the self and managing one's accounts become virtually the same thing, as "economic and financial constraints are thus transformed into *self*-constraint and *self*-blame, since we alone are responsible for what happens to us."⁵⁰ By transposing economic strategies onto personal morality and responsibility, neoliberalism effectively personalizes all risk. Failure becomes the individual's responsibility without taking into context the structural conditions that might have lead up to this failure. The economy of the self imagines itself to be entirely closed off from the outside, a monad, making the cause for every success and failure stem from inside this closed, narcissistic system.

With this in mind, it is easy to see the more sinister side of self-management and self-care as disciplines under neoliberalism. As Dardot and Laval point out, "To succeed, you must know yourself and love yourself. Hence the stress on the magical expression 'self-esteem', key to all success."⁵¹ This is why the discourse of *African Ancestry, Inc.* is so precarious: by reframing the African-American subject as an entrepreneur of the self, by framing the discovery of authentic African-ness as an empowering part of self-management and self-care, the company is erasing the actual historical causes of the violence and inequalities suffered by African-Americans in favor of a boutique ethnicity that circulates as a commodity within the economy of the self. Through this discourse centered on the self, the historical realities of race and ethnicity – artifacts of the post/colonial era – are covered over, and parasitized, by neoliberalism, which makes ethnic identity about fashion and value. African Ancestry, as both a company and a concept, crystallizes the relations between the post/colonial and the neoliberal, which seeks to use the remnants of colonialism such as race as a tool of subjection, used to foster the capital of self.

ENDNOTES

1. While the auction was taken down, Obadike documented the project and a screen capture of the eBay page at the time it was taken down can be seen here: <http://obadike.tripod.com/ebay.html>
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Franz Fanon, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man." In *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 90.
5. Fanon's essay was previously translated into English as, "The Fact of Blackness," which has been updated to the more phenomenological phrase, "lived experience."
6. Fanon, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," 91.
7. Ibid., 92.

8. These sequences are known as Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms, or SNPs, which are the result of the recoding and reshuffling when our genetic code is formed as the result of a combination of our parents' chromosomes. SNPs are like spelling errors in the genome that are unique to us as individuals.
9. Of course, other factors, such as environment, level of exercise, etc. play a large part in the development of any disease. While companies like *23andMe* typically went to some lengths to point this out to their customers, the discourse of their business belied a promise to unveil the secrets of the genome and, thus, to be able to speak with authority on the future health of the customer. This eventually brought them into conflict with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), who shut down the health assessment side of the business in November of 2013 because they were dispensing medical advice without the direct involvement of a physician or some other health care professional. This is not to say that genetic assessments of health have disappeared entirely, only that these tests are not so easily ordered directly by consumers and, instead, must be procured through a licensed medical professional. Needless to say, this has severely limited the scope of the genetic testing by companies like *23andMe*, who specialized in conveying the ongoing production of genetic knowledge through medical research, to customers through a genetic subscription service. Since the FDA no longer allows them to provide any information relating to the health of their customers, *23andMe* have turned their full attention to genetic screenings for ancestry and have thus come into direct competition with companies like *African Ancestry, Inc.*
10. While *African Ancestry, Inc.* is not the only company to focus on a target population – other companies like *AfricanDNA* and *RootsforReal* also market to African-Americans and other African-Diasporic peoples – it was one of the first to create a niche market for their services, and in their promotional and marketing materials the company frames the gaps in African-American history as a problem to which genetic screening is the solution.
11. For a full discussion of the importance of Alex Haley's *Roots* within a similar context, see Alondra Nelson, "Bio Science: Genetic Genealogy Testing and the Pursuit of African Ancestry." *Social Studies of Science* 38.5, Race, Genomics, and Biomedicine (October 2008): 759–783.
12. AfricanAncestry.com, accessed July 27, 2014. <http://www.africanancestry.com/home/>
13. AfricanAncestry.com, accessed July 27, 2014. <http://www.africanancestry.com/our-story/>
14. <https://www.youtube.com/user/AfricanAncestry>
15. <http://youtu.be/ZLmhh5lqwbE?list=UUa8wJLgqIK9o-L4bP8EQLwA>
16. *Ibid.*; emphasis in original.
17. *Ibid.*
18. One troubling aspect of all DTC genetics testing is the question of ownership. After submitting your DNA to the company for analysis, the company actually owns that information and is able to use it (albeit anonymously) in future studies. Thus, the exchange that takes place in the case of genetic genealogy testing is more than simply monetary. The customer is, effectively, giving a piece of themselves for this knowledge of their past. See the fine print of the terms and conditions for an eye-opening example: <http://africanancestry.com/terms/>
19. AfricanAncestry.com, accessed on August 29, 2014. <http://shop.africanancestry.com/MatriClan-Test-Kit-p/mc001.htm>
20. Nelson, "Bio Science."
21. *Ibid.*, 767.
22. *Ibid.*, 769–770.

23. Ibid., 763.
24. Ibid., 771. Nelson is referencing Joseph Dumit's book *Picturing Personhood: Brain Scans and Biomedical Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).
25. Quite literally, in the case of *African Ancestry, Inc.*
26. Indeed, Nelson even suggests that the success of a company like *African Ancestry, Inc.* is its ability to align itself with the roots-seeking narrative in Alex Haley's *Roots*: "As I described, African Ancestry's services are popular among root-seekers of African decent because they approximate Haley's *Roots* journey and because the company claims to hold the largest collection of 'African DNA'" (767).
27. Saadia Touval, "Treaties, Borders, and the Partition of Africa." *The Journal of African History* 7.2 (1966): 279–293.
28. John Ravenhill, "Redrawing the Map of Africa." In *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*, ed. Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 282–283.
29. Adekunle Ajala, "The Nature of African Boundaries." *Africa Spectrum* 18.2 (1983): 177–189.
30. This number is explicitly listed in the documentation of the testing kits sold by *African Ancestry, Inc.*, as well as in videotaped discussions with Rick Kittles, the co-founder and scientific director of the company.
31. The colors of the pan-African flag.
32. Nelson, "Bio Science," 776.
33. Ibid.
34. Several services like this come up immediately on a Google search, such as Irish GenealogyTours.com, which offers a more literal service than the genetic genealogy services of *African Ancestry, Inc.*
35. John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1.
36. Ibid., 40.
37. Manfred B. Steger and Ravi K. Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 11.
38. Ibid., 12.
39. Ibid.
40. Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 3.
41. Ibid., 6.
42. Ibid.
43. Sarah Franklin, "Life Itself: Global Nature and the Genetic Imaginary." In *Global Nature, Global Culture*, ed. Sarah Franklin, Celia Lury, and Jackie Stacey (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 190.
44. Ibid., 191.
45. This quote comes from Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, but is quoted in David Graeber's *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2011), 25.
46. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978–79*. Trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 226.
47. Ibid., 228.
48. Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *The New Way of the World: On Neo-Liberal Society* (London: Verso, 2013), 275.
49. Ibid.; emphasis in original.
50. Ibid., 274; emphasis in original.
51. Ibid.

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CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

NEOLIBERAL COLONIALISM?

A postcolonial reading of “land grabbing” in Africa



Kate Manzo and Rory Padfield

INTRODUCTION

Over the last twelve months, large-scale acquisitions of farmland in Africa, Latin America, Central Asia and Southeast Asia have made headlines in a flurry of media reports across the world. [. . .] This is rightly a hot issue because land is so central to identity, livelihoods and food security.¹

Much scholarly analysis has so far linked this land rush to a more general crisis of neoliberal capitalism, unleashing capital's appetite for new sources of accumulation.²

Evidence of an expanding web of transnational land deals and corporate investments in Africa continues to grow in light of a recent report into this phenomenon. Launched in 2012, the Land Matrix Global Observatory database shows that six of the top ten countries targeted for investment are located in Africa. Furthermore, the top two investor countries are the USA and Malaysia, and not – as one might expect – the USA and China.³

The aim of this essay is to ask critically to what extent these headline-making acquisitions are merely colonialism by another name. The question is relevant because large-scale land deals “raise the spectre of the ‘bad old days’ of colonialism and exploitative plantations.”⁴ The spectre of colonialism haunts charges of neo-colonial “land grabbing”⁵ and a “new scramble for Africa.”⁶ These charges are unsurprising given the centrality of well-documented land acquisition to colonialism in the past. Philosopher V.Y. Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa* associates colonial power with three key processes, namely the acquisition and exploitation of land, the domestication of colonized peoples, and the institution of new modes of production.⁷ In *Culture and Imperialism*, cultural and literary scholar Edward Said similarly suggests that “the actual geographical possession of land is what empire in the final analysis is all about.”⁸ Since then, geographer Cole Harris has argued that “a fuller understanding of colonial powers is achieved by explaining colonialism's basic geographical dispossession of the colonised.”⁹

In this essay, we wish to explore the question of land grabbing through the post-colonial lens exemplified by Said's classic *Orientalism* and postcolonial writings in

African studies. As the term *postcolonialism* means different things to different people, we briefly elucidate here what we mean by that term. Firstly, following Rita Abrahamsen's call for a more constructive dialogue between African studies and postcolonial thought, we understand postcolonialism as "a deep engagement with the role of power in the formation of identity and subjectivity and the relationship between knowledge and political practices."¹⁰ Practices such as contemporary land grabbing are therefore culture and political economy, narrative and policy; they are the product of interactions "between power, discourse and political institutions and practices."¹¹

Our conception of power as productive of identity and subjectivity mirrors the Foucauldian understanding of power/knowledge employed in the aforementioned writings of Said and Mudimbe. Their work suggest that places in the world are both real and imagined, i.e. empirical territories and cultural inventions. Under colonialism, the African continent produced a range of raw materials such as gold, diamonds, cotton, and coffee for export mainly to imperial centers. But this place called Africa was also an "idea" for European colonizers. As Mudimbe argues in *The Idea of Africa*, "Africa (as well as Asia and Europe) is represented in Western scholarship by 'fantasies' and 'constructs' made up by scholars and writers since Greek times."¹² Colonialism in Africa depended for its legitimacy on key binary constructs of self/other, civilized/barbaric, advanced/primitive, developed/undeveloped, and productive/unproductive. It also depended on a particular fable – a "circular discourse about . . . nothingness."¹³ The place called Africa was not only scripted as bestial, strange, monstrous, even childlike; an imaginary Africa also "served as a metaphor of absence – a 'dark continent' against which the lightness and whiteness of 'Western civilisation' can be pictured."¹⁴

Postcolonial analysis, although concerned with contemporary issues and themes, frequently involves "looking back to see forward"¹⁵ in order to identify patterns of continuity and change in colonial power relations over time. This essay does likewise, thereby contributing a postcolonial perspective to the growing body of scholarship on contemporary land grabbing.

The essay is divided into the following three sections. Part Two explores the drivers (or causes) of corporate land acquisitions in Africa and it includes a case study on palm oil investments by foreign-owned firms. Part Three discusses the means by which these acquisitions occur. Part Four analyzes the accompanying narratives that seek to explain and legitimize increasingly contested land deals. In each part, we recognize the value of differentiating between "the immediate and the more fundamental dynamics at work."¹⁶ Immediate triggers are the food and fuel price hikes of 2007–2008. The more fundamental dynamics associated with global capitalism, statehood, and relations of power concern commodity markets, capital penetration, and land rights within a context of neoliberal restructuring.

Neoliberal actors such as multinational corporations are arguably the new colonial forces: "transnational companies today do what European empires did in the last century – exploit natural resources and take advantage of low-cost labour – but without needing to take over and govern the entire country."¹⁷ This raises significant questions about *who* (which actors), *what* (is being exploited), *why* (for what end-use) and *how* (is the exploitation legitimized and maintained). Recent land acquirers are demonstrably global and diverse; their exploitation is of agricultural land as

well as petroleum-rich areas and mines; and their interests are in biofuels production for energy markets as well as foodstuffs. To illustrate these trends, we focus both empirically and historically on corporate land acquisitions for palm oil – a crop with agro-industrial as well as biofuel market potential. These draw together and overlap the twin production categories of food and energy while highlighting emergent patterns of intercontinental (Asia to Africa) corporate investments and capital transfers such as Malaysian and Singaporean palm oil investments in Liberia.

In addressing the *how* question, we show how colonial binaries and imaginaries underpin the conceptions of progress, production, and property at work in current land deals and development policies. There are clear echoes of the colonial concept of *terra nullius* in stakeholder references to acquired lands as being “empty” and “idle.” The rights of traditional (untitled) users of these lands are still largely unrecognized. Physical violence and the acquisition of lands for colonial settlement have diminished in significance, whereas “the inevitable striving of finance capital to extend its economic territory” as capitalism develops¹⁸ continues apace. Furthermore, the central role of foreign direct investment (FDI) in land deals in Africa does not equate to foreign purchase of ownership rights as the rights acquired are mostly use rights in the form of leases and concessions. Legal ownership of land still resides primarily with the postcolonial African state (as it did previously with colonial sovereigns). The postcolonial shift in the world economy from foreign ownership to possession and control of strategic assets such as land and labor is still apparent. Transnational actors remain able to acquire and exploit land without the need for legal ownership.

These continuities are doubly significant. They not only justify capitalist modes of production on lands still utilized and occupied by African peoples, but they also reinvent “Africa” as a place in the world defined by absence and lack – one that cannot progress and develop without foreign interventions and modes of production.

DRIVERS: AFRICA IN THE WORLD ECONOMY: COMMODITY MARKETS AND PRICES

FDI in African land is certainly not new. Plantation economies producing relatively low value commodities such as cocoa and cotton in exchange for finished manufactures was a feature of colonial production and unequal exchange. A forced labor system for the production of agricultural commodities was also a key feature of the colonial political economy.

Forced labor and the production of primary commodities such as cocoa on small family farms continue to define outward-oriented development in countries such as Cote d’Ivoire.¹⁹ A “notable development since 1980” however has been the expansion of cultivated areas in Africa for “higher-value crops such as fresh vegetables, cut flowers, citrus and grapes.”²⁰ In *Full Planet, Empty Plates: The New Geopolitics of Food Security*, Lester Brown argues that world food price increases, depleting global food reserves, and the continuing population boom has ushered in a new geopolitics of food – with much attention focused on a scramble for land in Africa.²¹ The issues raised there are graphically illustrated in Figure 29.1.

In a World Bank report detailing 465 land acquisition deals in various stages of development between October 2008 and August 2009, nearly half of the deals and some two-thirds of the land area were located in sub-Saharan Africa. Such deals are



Figure 29.1 Timar, France. Earthworks competition cartoon.
Source: Used with kind permission of the Ken Sprague Fund.

increasing in frequency, as countries outside of Africa with mounting domestic food security challenges of their own aim to secure large areas of land for food production means. A recent example includes the acquisition of 250,000 acres in Sudan in 2012 by a food company based in the United Arab Emirates to grow wheat, other grains, and soya beans. The plan is that the harvests will return to UAE and the Gulf States. As Brown notes, many of the countries with the largest land deals to overseas investors in sub-Saharan Africa are also where millions of people are being sustained with food donations from the United Nations World Food Programme.²²

Most reported international land deals involve the private sector – not only speculative investors but also global food production companies and biofuels developers. The majority of those documented “continue to be run as large plantations based on concessions or leases,”²³ which raises the possibility of a return to exploitative plantations under foreign control. It also signals both continuities and changes in African experiences of globalization and the narratives that surround it. James Ferguson’s *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* argues that a “combination of privately secured mineral-extraction enclaves and weakly governed humanitarian hinterlands” defines neoliberal globalization on the African continent. Global capital connects “usable” parts of the continent to the world economy while “hopping” over “unusable Africa.”²⁴ The disconnection of “unusable” places from the world

economy has fueled conceptions of Africa as a marginalized continent and reinvented it as a purely negative case – a “featureless void defined only by its exclusion from the benefits of global capitalism.”²⁵

Ferguson’s analysis – his distinction between usable/unusable places and argument that “Africa is inevitably characterised by reference to a series of lacks, failures, problems, and crises”²⁶ – raises the issue of why capital would ever invest there at all. Our palm oil case study shows how Africa has been made attractive to investors by African state policies and not simply exogenous forces.

PALM OIL CASE STUDY: POLICIES OF ATTRACTION AND PROMOTION

Most countries in tropical Africa are open to FDI transactions, whether via the requirements of international lending programs (i.e. SAPs) or driven by their own development strategies. The efforts made by a number of states to secure business by offering long-term palm oil concessions at low costs has made Africa an attractive business venture.²⁷ Indeed, the Nigerian Institute for Oil Palm Research admits that the “promotion of private sector participation in oil palm plantation holds the ace in *effective revival* of the produce business in the country” (emphasis added).²⁸ The increase of foreign private firms in Nigeria (five contracts awarded since 2002 at a total of 250,000 hectares) and across many countries in tropical Africa thus supports the notion that foreign owned palm oil plantations – with superior access to financial and human resources, as opposed to local agencies (whether private sector or government funded) – are perceived by the recipient countries as central to “modernizing” their agricultural economies.

The case of foreign palm oil investment in Africa illustrates the scale and globalization of the recent postcolonial “land grab” phenomenon. Data from the Land Matrix Global Observatory shows that since the mid-2000s the number of palm oil concessions to foreign firms in tropical Africa (i.e. West, Central and parts of Southern Africa) has increased over ten-fold – from only four concessions between 2000 and 2006 to 47 by 2013 (see Figure 29.2). While there is a degree of uncertainty in terms of the amount of land allocated within a concession/lease and that is actually taken up for production, it is estimated that the intended allocation of land for palm oil plantations from these 47 concessions is in the region of two million hectares.

As shown in Figure 29.2, there was a rapid rise in concessions awarded to foreign firms from all four geographic regions after 2006 followed by a decline after 2012. The rise in palm oil concessions after 2006 can be explained by three key drivers. Firstly, as we have mentioned earlier, the global food price hike in 2006/7 led to improved profitability for food commodity growers, including palm oil cultivators. The spike in prices immediately improved the economic case for large-scale plantations by reducing considerably the payback time for potential investors. Secondly, compared with other crops such as vegetables, cereals, and fruits, palm oil is regarded as a relatively lucrative crop due in part to the steady increase in global demand for vegetable oils. Palm oil also has the added potential for biofuel production – this is significant in light of international policy initiatives, such as the EU’s Renewable Energy Directive, which requires 20 percent of the energy consumed within the European Union to be from renewable sources by 2020.

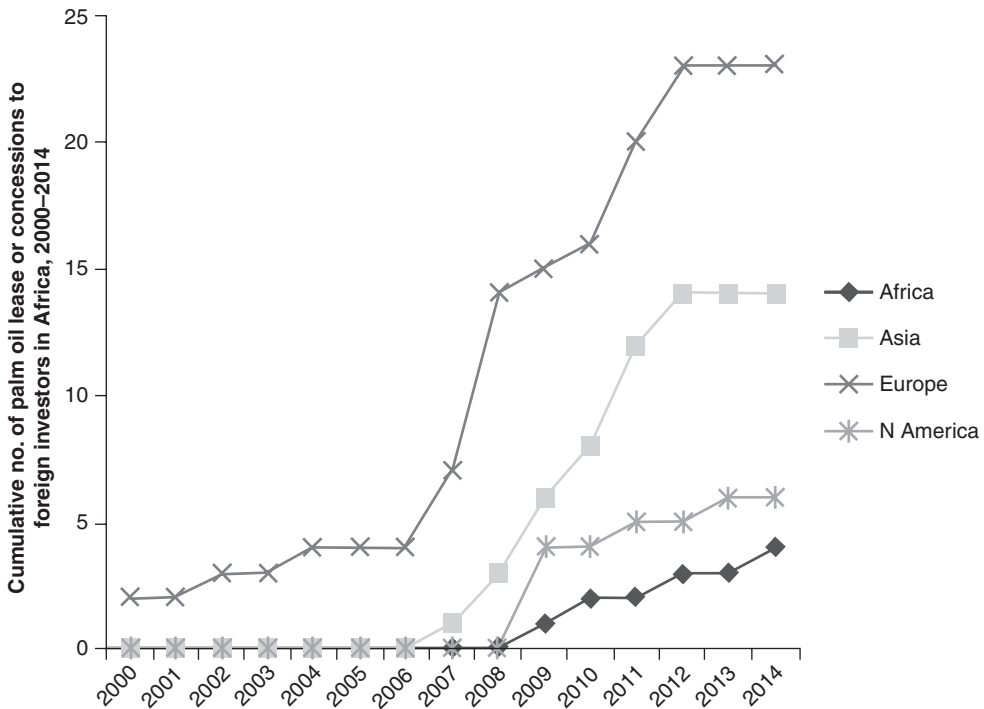


Figure 29.2 Palm oil concession and leases in Africa to foreign investors as categorized by region of investor, 2000–2014.
Source: Adapted from *Land Matrix Global Observatory Data* (2014).

Thirdly, countries in tropical Africa have vast areas of available land as well as the necessary climate (high rainfall and consistently high temperatures) and soil type for palm oil cultivation. Interestingly, the corporate land acquisition trend for oil palm expansion in Africa exhibits traditional and less traditional patterns in terms of the origin of the foreign investors. In line with aforementioned concerns about neo-colonialism, foreign firms with European origins are the largest group to take up concessions and leases. Leveraging historic connections to former colonial territories (i.e. UK–Nigeria, UK–Sierra Leone, France–Cameroon, Portugal–Angola), firms with origins in UK, France, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Belgium dominate palm oil concessions from Europe. One of the single largest investors from Europe is an Italian company, Fri-El Green Power, who has an 11,000-hectare concession exclusively for palm oil cultivation in the Abia region of Nigeria. Fri-El Green power reportedly have the option to expand their production to a maximum of 100,000 hectares and plan to use the palm oil processed in Nigeria as a biofuel for export to Europe.²⁹

The second largest investor region is Asia, specifically China, Iran, India, Malaysia, and Singapore. In terms of the history of African land acquisition, Malaysia and Singapore are relatively new players. The increasing number and scale of overseas ventures in the past ten years reflects the expanding commercial priorities of Southeast Asian homegrown companies (see Table 29.1). Malaysia has a history of commercial

Table 29.1 Summary of Southeast Asian oil palm companies' existing and planned investment activities in tropical Africa.

Palm oil companies by country of origin	<i>Location of investments by Southeast Asian palm oil countries</i>						
	<i>Uganda</i>	<i>Nigeria</i>	<i>Liberia</i>	<i>Gabon</i>	<i>Cameroon</i>	<i>Cote d'Ivoire</i>	<i>Ghana</i>
<i>Malaysia</i>			EP		PP		
– Sime Darby							
– Felda							
<i>Singapore</i>	EP	EP, PP	EP, PP	EP		EP	EP
– Olam International							
– Wilmar International							
– GAR							
<i>Indonesia</i>			PP			PP	
– Bakrie Sumatera Plantations							

Key: EP = existing plantations, PP = planned plantations

Source: Adapted from Penikett and Park (2013).

palm oil cultivation and processing and industry personnel and consultants are prominent figures in the emerging palm oil geographies of tropical Africa. The Malaysian firm Sime Darby, for example, has one of the largest single concessions, having acquired over 300,000 hectares in Liberia in 2009. A Singaporean company, Golden Agri-Resources, also acquired a similar size plantation (300,000 hectares) in Liberia in 2010. In both cases, the intended use of the palm oil is food as well as biofuel production.

Table 29.1 reflects the geographical spread of investment by Southeast Asian palm oil companies in tropical Africa. Singaporean companies are the most active in terms of existing and planned plantations (operative in six countries) as well as the number of companies (three) engaged in palm oil business in the region. Whilst Malaysian and Indonesian firms have existing and/or planned plantations in two countries, it is notable that Liberia is a recipient of investment from companies with origins in all three Southeast Asian countries (including some of the largest single land acquisition deals, as mentioned above). Recent media reports suggest that despite the lack of investments by Asian palm oil companies in Africa since 2012 (as shown in Figure 29.2), there are still considerable prospects for palm oil companies in the region.³⁰

With regard to biofuels production, climate change mitigation and energy security motivate a number of actors. As noted in *Forbes* magazine, rising oil prices “thrust bio-fuels into the spotlight as an antidote to energy insecurity.”³¹ None more so than palm oil, which compared with other oil crops such as rapeseed and soya is more productive in terms of the amount of oil produced per area of cultivated land³² and thus regarded as a valuable oil crop to potential investors and growers. Target countries pursuing policies of outward-oriented agricultural development see opportunities in “large-scale plantations run by conglomerates of multinational companies in alliance

with national governments. Yet there are also many small-scale operations, involving NGOs responding to climate change targets.”³³

There is a seeming paradox here. The so-called food vs. fuel debate since 2008 was sparked by the description of biofuels as a “crime against humanity” by Jean Ziegler, then UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.³⁴ A major concern is the long-term impact of export-led biofuel expansion on food availability and security of production – as graphically demonstrated earlier in Figure 29.1.

Lowered oil prices may help dampen enthusiasm for biofuels production. A reported “shift away from conventional bio-fuels in favour of next generation alternatives derived from non-food commodity crops”³⁵ suggests furthermore that the issue is not simply food vs. fuel (production and prices), but also the relative value of different commodities. Palm oil prices more than tripled between 2000 and 2008 thanks to increased global demand for vegetable oils. At the same time, palm oil itself is one of the cheaper biofuels to produce.³⁶ Biofuels in general and palm oil in particular are therefore likely to “remain and increase as an option in the longer term.”³⁷

MEANS

In addition to fluctuating commodity prices, drives into Africa are fueled by widespread perceptions that land on the continent is quite literally freely available as well as abundant. Documented land deals in Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, Mali, and Sudan “involved no or minimal land fees.”³⁸ The financial value of land transfers is generally low “and an unimportant component of negotiations.”³⁹

The question of why African governments willingly broker land deals in exchange for so little short-term gain is addressed later in the essay in regard to development agendas. The more immediate question is how states legally claim ownership of the lands they turn over. To answer this, we explore the narrative of property rights embedded in colonial and postcolonial systems of law.

ACCESS TO LAND: LAWS, PROPERTY RIGHTS, AND THE ALLOCATION OF LEASES

The “first land grab in Africa” apparently dates from 1885 to 1915.⁴⁰ European interest in acquiring lands and resources both legally and cheaply increased during this time with the rise of anti-slavery and humanist movements at home. Access to coastal lands for trading and other purposes had already been negotiated with local chiefs. Accompanying recognition of “peaceful native occupancy” of settled areas facilitated land deals such as those between the British Royal Niger Company and West African chiefs for access to land for palm oil plantations.⁴¹ However, recognition of customary tenure did not include legal recognition of ownership rights. Nor did it cover “the several billion hectares of unfarmed lands” occupying most of the continent. These lands were defined in European feudal terms as vacant “wastes” and untitled “commons.” When feudal law became colonial law, the legal dispossession of Africans by newly established colonial states became “more or less total.”⁴²

The outright sale of large tracts of land by colonial powers “was often prohibited or limited by later colonial legislation so that long, renewable leases became the norm.”⁴³ As mentioned already, “land leases, rather than purchases, are predominant

in Africa, and host country governments tend to play a key role in allocating them.”⁴⁴ With formal decolonization, ultimate title and controlling authority in land changed hands from colonial states to newly independent governments. Recognition of native title was generally minimal thanks to “the restricted definition of ‘property’ in the colonial construction – and the postcolonial reproduction – of ‘customary’ tenure.”⁴⁵

Across Africa, “post-independence land laws confirm that untitled lands are therefore lands without owners or even lawful occupants.”⁴⁶ Newly independent governments did not consider land rights as absolute, but as “contingent upon the priorities of development.”⁴⁷ Limited native land rights – such as recognition of customary tenure as possession rather than property ownership – were therefore sometimes reduced further by policies of land reform, land nationalization, and/or outward-oriented agricultural development.

The contemporary upshot is that “lands being sold or mainly leased are lands or land types which governments claim as their own, and/or as rightfully theirs to dispose of.”⁴⁸ Such claims serve to consolidate state power as well as enhance economic performance. In *On the Postcolony*, Achille Mbembe argues that postcolonial governance, i.e. political “control of people and allocation of goods, benefits and percentages” has been underpinned by force “but also involved transfers, reciprocity, and obligations.”⁴⁹ When a state loses the capacity “to regulate and arbitrate that enabled it to construct its legitimacy,” then arguably “all it has left is control of the forces of coercion.”⁵⁰

Loss of state economic capacity was precisely the point of the neoliberal, World Bank-led structural adjustment programs (SAPs) of the 1990s. The three components of rationalization, liberalization, and privatization were designed to reduce state control of production and exchange in order to facilitate the global movement of goods and capital. The African state was perceived by the World Bank in the 1980s as “an irrational and/or hapless obstacle to the neo-liberal economic agenda of unleashing market forces.”⁵¹ But however sound in theoretical terms, the intention to weaken the state meant that SAPs were a political contradiction in terms: “the adjustment reforms were to be implemented by the very state which was intended to be ‘reduced.’”⁵²

State reduction – or rationalization – was to be achieved through financial order and fiscal restraint, which entailed shrinking the size of the public sector through drastic cuts in employment. The typical economic adjustment package entailed “a ‘one-size-fits-all’ programme of currency devaluation, liberalization of prices and interest rates, fiscal restraint and austerity (i.e. cuts in state expenditure) and trade liberalisation.”⁵³ Concerning land, the plan was to free up markets and facilitate private investment in existing farmland as well as in vast reserves perceived as “pristine” and “awaiting exploitation.”⁵⁴

Structural adjustment inevitably posed a political challenge to African regimes heavily dependent on financial aid. The combined promise of capital inflows, investor demand for land, and renewed interest in agricultural development meant that “with very few exceptions, all African regimes would in the end comply with structural adjustment.”⁵⁵ By 2005, most African governments had moved to privatize state-owned farms as well as enacted “foreign investment-friendly promotion laws modelled by international agencies.”⁵⁶

The effects of neoliberal readjustment of the African state have been uneven at best. The results of several decades of SAPs have been described as “a diminution of

state capacity, the privatisation of previously public assets and the financialisation of economic networks, linked to a new form of global capitalism.”⁵⁷ Mbembe goes further to suggest a complete realignment of postcolonial government. He argues that SAPs produced a situation of “fractionated sovereignty” and subjected African states to a neo-colonial form of “tutelary government” exercised by international forces.⁵⁸

And yet, African state power has arguably ameliorated in the wake of structural adjustment. Capital-poor governments have managed to turn SAPs to their advantage despite the political challenges. African political elites have benefited from financial injections while playing the neo-colonialism card. Structural adjustment provided them “with a new external cause, or scapegoat, for the economic crisis which their countries suffer.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, African states have drawn succor from a key remaining strategic asset, namely ownership and control of untitled land. By extending the reach of the state as well as capital into “weakly governed humanitarian hinterlands,” international land deals enable an extension of state power and control. They are a “partial refusal of the more doctrinaire propositions of the neoliberal globalisers” and “an accommodation between the developmentalist state and the neoliberal orientation of the multilateral institutions.”⁶⁰

In sum, African governments maintain ownership rights over vast tracts of land once controlled by European colonial powers. When leasehold expires, whatever land rights have been granted revert to the state. The perception that targeted land is both state-owned and abundant is rooted in the fact that most of this land is untitled. Untitled does not, however, mean unused or unclaimed. Users such as herders and hunters “commonly draw on unwritten tenure systems founding their legitimacy on ‘tradition’ – though in practice they have changed profoundly over time.”⁶¹

The next part explores the ways in which both states and investors evoke colonial fantasies and imaginaries in response to untitled land claims.

NARRATIVES: *TERRA NULLIUS* AND NON-RECOGNITION: “WASTE” LANDS AS “EMPTY” AND “IDLE”

If “existing land uses and claims go unrecognised” it is “because land users are marginalised from formal land rights and access to the law and institutions.”⁶² Arguably, “the assumption that much land in sub-Saharan Africa is indeed ‘idle’ land, which if exploited could potentially solve several problems, has been exposed with some authority.”⁶³ Yet, the common lands used by many rural households are “still deemed in most state laws to be unowned, vacant and available.”⁶⁴ Current FDI flows and land acquisitions are thus “taking place in contexts where many people have only insecure land rights – which makes them vulnerable to dispossession.”⁶⁵

The preconditions for settler colonialism in British colonies were not only coercive but also discursive. Physical violence took place within a colonial state framework drawn around transplanted property law (as mentioned before) and a European cultural distinction between civilization and savagery. Traceable in the early modern period to the writings of John Locke (his labor theory of value, in particular), the distinction was “powerfully reinforced by an increasingly strident racism and the achievements of industrial production,” i.e. by dichotomies of machine power/manual labor, progress/stagnation, and science/superstition.⁶⁶

If the ability to dominate nature was a marker of progress, then “people who marked the land lightly and lived within the rhythms of nature were obviously unprogressive and backward.”⁶⁷ Crucial to this particular narrative was a conception of property as “exchange value.” The imagined transition from savagery to civilization entailed an evolution from customary rights in common land to proprietary rights in private property, and from land as a public good to land as a saleable commodity with commercial value. As Harris argues, “a discourse that treated colonial land as waste awaiting development and its inhabitants as backward and lazy was exceedingly serviceable” for both capital and settlers attracted by the prospect of unused land.⁶⁸

The legal concept of *terra nullius*, meaning empty land, was a shorthand expression of that geographic imagination. It differed conceptually from the later colonial doctrine of trusteeship although “both instituted a moral justification for the appropriation of native land, and of empire itself.”⁶⁹ *Terra nullius* provided a “conceptual link between property rights and the moral obligation to prosper”; by extension it offered a moral justification for appropriating “waste” and uncultivated land. Whereas trusteeship signaled a duty to civilize, *terra nullius* expressed “the duty to make the earth bountiful and productive.”⁷⁰

Colonial concepts such as “idle” and “empty” that are “used to justify land allocations to investors . . . feature quite prominently in some of the country reports” studied by Cotula et al.⁷¹ Even those that treat “land grab” analysis as too simplistic, such as the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED; a London-based think-tank), understand that such terms do not reflect a lack of occupation or usage of land.⁷² They refer instead “to lands used in ways that are not perceived as ‘productive’ by government.”⁷³ Likewise, in the context of palm oil expansion in Africa, industry analysts refer to the “availability of vast tracks of arable land”;⁷⁴ such language implies the palm oil industry can facilitate agricultural development via the cultivation of existing “unproductive land.”

As well as harking back to early colonialism and early modernity, virtual notions of *terra nullius* evoke modernization theory’s underlying distinction between modern and traditional spaces. The latter were conceived as ripe for “improvement” and transformation: “a *terra nullius* zone outside the invigorating dynamics of capitalist modernity.”⁷⁵ *Terra nullius* is thus a classic discourse of modernization as well as a moral justification for land appropriation, which is why Fouad Makki associates its usage in contemporary Ethiopia with “development by dispossession.”⁷⁶

OPPORTUNITY OR CATASTROPHE? DEVELOPMENT MODELS AND PROMISES

Those who equate corporate land acquisitions with opportunities for economic development include think-tanks like the IIED as well as international lending institutions such as the World Bank. They also include African governments willing to donate land to investors in expectation (or hope) of rural modernization and development. A “recurring theme” in many country reports “is the relatively low importance and value of financial transfers compared to the expected broader economic benefits such as employment generation and infrastructure development.”⁷⁷ FDI “is seen as capable of bringing new technologies, developing productive potential, facilitating infrastructure development, and creating employment and supply of food to local markets.”⁷⁸

In this context a polarized policy debate – one fueled in part by renewed arguments for the comparative advantage of a large farm model – is apparent between supporters and opponents of large-scale corporate land deals. Although it may be too soon to predict “what paths and types of development, if any, might result from the current phase” the underlying “convergence of different global crises” combined with an ongoing impasse in rural development suggest that “a crisis of neoliberal capitalism has encountered one of neoliberal development.”⁷⁹

The aforementioned accommodation between developmentalist states and other stakeholders in land deals has been described as a form of “embedded liberalism,” whereby “economic ‘multilateralism’ is predicated on ‘domestic intervention.’”⁸⁰ Where such intervention entails the allocation of land to large-scale investors (either domestic or foreign) for the production of marketable commodities, then crisis resolution would seem to rest on the very same market forces and prices responsible for crisis in the first place. In this context, there is no guarantee of employment generation – the claims for which are often over-stated. The extent to which “commitments on investment, jobs and infrastructure are legally enforceable in the same way as government commitments to provide and maintain access to land” is also debatable.⁸¹

CONCLUSION

This essay has explored the ongoing connection between colonial relations of power and territoriality (notably land dispossession) via analysis of contemporary “land grabbing” in Africa. As noted in the introduction, the twenty-first century land deals attracting media and academic attention have been linked not only to claims of neo-colonialism but also to a more general crisis of neoliberal capitalism. We situated current events in historical context in order to address the *why* (key drivers) and the *how* (means and narratives) of land deals in Africa. This approach was consistent with our postcolonial theoretical framework, which aims to identify patterns of continuity and change in colonial power relations over time. It was also necessary to answer our main question, which was the extent to which headline-making land acquisitions are merely colonialism by another name.

In terms of drivers, our findings suggest the importance of distinguishing fundamental dynamics of global capitalism – notably finance capital’s inevitable striving for new economic territories and sources of accumulation – and more proximate factors associated with neoliberal restructuring. The latter are those processes promoted by structural adjustment policies in Africa, notably state rationalization, economic liberalization, and privatization of assets and resources.

Our palm oil case study in part one demonstrates both the changing character and ongoing logic of capital investments in Africa. Many “land grabs” are a mirror of colonial patterns of acquisition in that European firms with origins in imperial heartlands such as the UK, France, and Portugal are leveraging historic connections to former colonial territories. At the same time, Asia is becoming a major investor region in tropical Africa. Palm oil cultivation through African-Asian and African-European partnerships is seen as a win-win situation for African governments in search of FDI as well as for foreign private corporations, such as the Malaysian investor Sime Darby.

The remainder of the essay has explored the mechanisms by which land deals are orchestrated and rationalized. The combination of legal, cultural, economic, and political means deployed by postcolonial African states to secure investments in land demonstrates strong links to the colonial past as well as the significance of more recent neoliberal development agendas. Control over land via state ownership rights in untitled land is a key strategic resource for postcolonial African states, as it was for their colonial predecessors, which is why the land rights acquired by foreign corporations are mostly use rights in the form of leases and concessions. It is too soon to say whether this lack of ownership rights in land will prove a blessing or a burden for would-be producers. However, broader changes in the world economy, such as the shift from ownership to control of strategic assets such as land and labor, suggest that capital expansion into once “unusable Africa” is destined to remain an attractive option for investors.

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CONCLUSION

WHAT IS THE POSTCOLONIAL WORLD?

Assembling, networking, traveling



David D. Kim

To measure the distance between theory then and now, there and here, to record the encounter of theory with resistances to it, to move skeptically in the broader political world where such things as the humanities or the great classics ought to be seen as small provinces of the human venture, to map the territory covered by all the techniques of dissemination, communication, and interpretation, to preserve some modest (perhaps shrinking) belief in noncoercive human community: if these are not imperatives, they do at least seem to be attractive alternatives.

—Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*

ASSEMBLING THE POSTCOLONIAL WORLD

So what is the postcolonial world and how do we take account of it? Having solicited close to thirty essays on various thematic, disciplinary, geopolitical, and methodological approaches to postcolonial studies, do we understand any better the nature of this dual query? Does it involve picturing the *postcolonial* world alongside the *postmodern* world and the *postcommunist* one? Does postcolonial theory as a now well-established critique suggest an altogether different and eminently belated epistemological undertaking in Derrida's sense of *différance*? Or is there a need after all to shift our attention from picturing the *postcolonial* world to assembling the postcolonial *world*?

In the past two years, since the inception of this multi-authored volume, I have wrestled with these questions while co-editing the preceding essays and rethinking my own intellectual commitment to a field as diverse as postcolonial studies. Commissioned by Routledge for its larger Worlds series, the polysemic title of this volume has served as a timely and decisive impetus for my reflection. But the truth of the matter is that I have been pondering for a much longer period of time whether those two words – those metaphors, really – can be conjoined as constitutive parts of an unambiguous, self-evident, and discrete entity: the postcolonial world.¹

According to Heidegger, the thing (*Ding*) is that which calls for an assembly. It differs, he argues, from a material object (*Gegenstand*).² If the postcolonial world, whatever its meaning, qualifies as such a communal matter of concern, I wish to open

these concluding remarks by asking again in what sense it weighs on us as an inherited legacy and who gets to partake in its transmission. To gather the postcolonial world is to register both the continuities and discontinuities between colonialism, anticolonialism, and postcolonialism. It is also to work through unresolved tensions between the postcolonial and the postmodern in intricately interconnected parts of the globe. As Stuart Hall, Anne McClintock, and Ella Shohat have made clear, the term “postcolonial” is irreducible to a temporal signifier, and it seems to me that we are still writing out the various ethical, ecological, moral, political, and socio-economic implications of this astute observation.³ To pursue postcolonial studies now is to ask from multiple shifting perspectives what alternatives there are to dominant power relations, why indigenous traditions continue to be marginalized from institutions of civil society, and how memories of colonial atrocity demand remembrance and responsibility across generational divides. While political refugees and other displaced persons from impoverished conflict zones are being turned away at international airports, on high seas, and in military borderlands, postcolonial intellectuals commit themselves to scrutinizing assumptions, dangers, secrecies, and wrongdoings when the global history of imperialism is given short shrift. Other urgent questions they address include the following: How does the postcolonial differ from or align itself with other subversive forms of *Weltanschauung* in neoliberal capitalism? What should the contemporary world look like from the perspective of a colonial subaltern? And why would this imagination be significant for the latest investigation of modernity?

The essays collected in this volume offer concordant and divergent answers to these questions, but it is not my intention to offer a retrospective summary here. Instead, I want to open up *The Postcolonial World* one last time by taking a more expansive look at its intervention in postcolonial studies. Since the chapters preceding this conclusion have taught us to engage in a wide range of critical inquiries into the colonial and the postcolonial through close reading, the following investigation takes the misleadingly simple title of this book as a productive starting point for an exercise in “distant reading” – that is, in cultural analytics with digital humanities methodologies – to assemble the postcolonial world on the basis of those contributions and other postcolonial scholarships.⁴ The aim of this closing chapter is to invite further reflection on the necessarily incomplete, plurivocal gathering in which we discuss the reasons why postcolonialism still matters in the twenty-first century.

When I speak of assembling or gathering the postcolonial world, I am thinking of the work that goes into making this heterogeneous and contested construct relevant for each community. It requires, as Heidegger reminds us within a more general context, a critical understanding of this activity as an essentially aesthetic problem.⁵ The postcolonial world does not amount to a concrete object around which intellectuals come together and discuss what they see; nor is it an uncontroversial imagination of common humanity some four decades after decolonization. Its transforming construction evolves everywhere in “a continual tension between agency and control, between individual inspiration and the rules of the discourse.”⁶ This explains why the postcolonial world only comes into view when cross-referential, multilingual, and interdisciplinary examinations tease out the extent to which our own views are limited. Instead of being a fixed object of judgment, the postcolonial world emerges from “a confluence of reception *and* production,” linking present scholars to past

thinkers and reinventing this linkage in each time-space.⁷ Its visibility is contingent upon the transformative movement of ideas and methodologies between distinct, yet related time-spaces. It is in this mobile, networking, and revelatory sense that the task of assembling the postcolonial world constitutes an aesthetic problem.

To move the discussion in this direction, I begin by examining an article in which two scholars located in Australia make a particularly pressing case about the contested relationship between postcolonialism, Marxism, and postmodernism. As I show, their rich interpretation focuses on five prominent works in postcolonial studies. But this means that those scholars are ignoring the vast array of issues, languages, and methodologies in the field, not to mention the diversity of postcolonial scholars around the globe. In lieu of this reductive assessment of postcolonial studies, I proceed by drawing upon the JSTOR database – on big data, that is – to capture at least for a brief moment a far greater currency of postcolonialism in global modernity. I illustrate how postcolonial scholars, as much concerned about the colonial past as about contemporary matters of concern in different parts of the world, intervene in the logic of cultural imperialism from many disciplinary, geopolitical, and theoretical perspectives. In addition to building upon the work of leading theorists, they complicate the ways in which the postcolonial world is visible. By generating a computationally visualized relation of their scholarly work, I document a vibrant dialogue as the currency of postcolonial consciousness in the twenty-first century.

Let me clarify the position out of which this examination arises. Basically, I find myself going back and forth between two increasingly frustrating orientations. On the one hand, I recognize the importance of differentiating “the space-clearing gesture” of postmodernism from an international commodification of the postcolonial in a global marketplace.⁸ As such, postcolonialism speaks to “the imagination” without which life in the Third World is impossible to comprehend as an inexhaustibly resourceful form of resistance and agency.⁹ Yet, this conception precludes the cultural production and the social experience of minorities in the rest of the world. It diminishes the global impact that imperialism has had on, say, European communities. It ignores Aijaz Ahmad’s poignant critique of the premise of Fredric Jameson’s Three Worlds Theory. As Ahmad points out, “we live not in three worlds but in one” and “this world includes the experience of colonialism and imperialism.”¹⁰ On the other hand, I feel that the notion of postcolonialism has in a way become *passé*, and this despite the fact that the colonial past implicates everyone in postmodernity and every culture bears “the postcolonial stamp.”¹¹ It is true that descendants of imperial subjects are haunted by the horrors of slavery, political oppression, genocidal war, and racial discrimination, as “links within and between different empires (European and non-European), and within and between different colonies,” make themselves felt across generations.¹² If the cover image of this book – the stunning artwork by Indian artist Reena Saini Kallat – offers this sort of intricate configuration of the postcolonial world, it does so because imperial connections and global imaginaries place individuals and communities in a thick network of attachments, exchanges, conflicts, memories, and responsibilities (see Jyotsna G. Singh). Nations continue to be distinguished from each other along distinctly colored, tightly patrolled borderlines, and the barbed wires represent these palpable lines of separation between cultural movements, mass migration, and international conflicts. However, the variously webbing

strings connecting distant lands undermine absolute claims to national sovereignty. They trace deeply rooted relations as well as vanishing footprints.

I am not alone in betraying a certain impatience with the task of remembering the postcolonial world as a tapestry of cultural narratives woven around East–West or North–South histories. More and more calls have emerged for a “reconstruction” of the field.¹³ With this critical observation, I do not wish to point out merely the aforementioned ambiguity of what constitutes the postcolonial; nor is it my intention to hearken back to an idealized or melancholic past where anticolonial revolutionaries such as Frantz Fanon and Che Guevara offer eye-opening criticisms of empire, the West, humanism, and democracy. What I am delineating is the emerging transformation of postcolonialism in the face of two major obstacles. Since the publication of Edward Said’s groundbreaking *Orientalism* in 1978, artists, writers, filmmakers, and scholars have run up against the vanishing memory of colonialism in late capitalism and the solidification of postcolonial theory in spite of an internationally shared and at the same time differentiated responsibility for remembrance.¹⁴ These obstacles point to anachronistic and divergent aspects of postcolonialism in the new realities of a post-Cold War world while hastening an already advanced subsumption of the postcolonial under the postmodern. Remember Said’s objection to the kind of jargon-filled, academic writing characteristic of “an astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the gravity of history and individual responsibility.”¹⁵ Writing at the end of the twentieth century, he observed that postmodernism, poststructuralism, New Historicism, and deconstruction constituted scholarly discourses whose dominant location in the American university was frustratingly decoupled from public debate. While Americans were relying more and more on spectacular media reports and polarizing politicians to see the world in superficial or oppositional terms, Said asserted that intellectuals failed to speak clearly on public matters of concern, gradually writing themselves out of democratic politics. Many postcolonial critics concede that this theoretical trend has distanced them from anticolonial-Marxist critiques of history, economy, and power while abstracting particular experiences of displacement, marginalization, and persecution. While some thinkers have responded to this movement by calling for a return to Marxism, others recommend that the field continue to be “informed by poststructuralism” in order to offer “a powerful vista into the modern world system at its moment of crisis.”¹⁶ Against the backdrop of these unsettled issues, I suggest that we revitalize postcolonial studies in a radically democratic assembly. From my perspective, the prospect of a postcolonial world in the twenty-first century hinges on a multifarious negotiation between artists, scholars, and activists who conceive of the postcolonial as an unfinished project – that is, as a *Ding* in global modernity.

In the following pages, I examine this potential, as it shapes our ability to see the postcolonial world at a time when there does not seem to be an immediate alternative to neoliberal capitalism. Since postcolonial theory has gradually removed us in the humanities and the social sciences from politics on the ground, so to speak, the central problem for intellectuals today has to do with reinvigorating the field not by adopting a singular discourse, but by concentrating on an interdisciplinary and transnational organization of community. Although the scope of postcolonial studies has grown exponentially since the last quarter of the twentieth century, its currency around the globe is devalued by the repeated and delimiting return to only

a handful of theorists whose scholarship deals mostly with British colonial practices and English-speaking postcolonial configurations. This dominant and theoretically inflected focus discounts the global network to which artists, filmmakers, scholars, writers, political activists, librarians, and museum curators belong as critical interpreters or situated practitioners of postcolonialism. It threatens to homogenize the diversity necessary for taking account of the postcolonial world in its continuous transformation into something ubiquitous and yet unfading. If postcolonial studies is to thrive in the twenty-first century, intellectuals will have to engage in a comparative, interdisciplinary, and transnational remembrance of postcolonialism as a public matter of concern, a concern that reveals numerous intersecting or overlapping genealogies of postcolonialism.

For this reason, I take into consideration the space that postcolonial intellectuals are occupying nowadays: where they work, whom they address, and what they study. As I contend, these determinants shape their alliances, scholarships, and methodologies. In the era of globalization, the postcolonial world is manifest in a rapidly changing public sphere where individual subjects are characterized by singularity and universality alike, and it is important to recognize this dynamic as a complex pattern. Although postcolonial scholars loosely share a common toolbox of theories and strategies, their work looks different from one cultural, national, geopolitical, or institutional context to another. To assemble the postcolonial world is to track these similarities and differences, as well as dialogues and silences.

POSTCOLONIALISM NOW?

To delve into the notion that postcolonial studies is in a state of crisis, I turn my attention to an article provocatively titled “What Was Postcolonialism?” and published in 2005 in the journal *New Literary History*. Its authors, Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, mount their narrative by teasing out the “pastness” of this theoretically inflected movement.¹⁷ By that they do not mean to declare some sort of victory over cultural imperialism or neocolonial profiteering; instead, they are advocating for a conceptual return in postcolonial studies. They claim that since current political struggles have not moved far beyond colonialist practices, it is important to understand “postcolonialism itself as an attitude of modernity,” which is to say, as a qualitative differentiation between past and present.¹⁸ Postcolonialism is inscribed in terms that invoke more of the past than the present and, as Mishra and Hodge argue, this “semantic seepage” is all the more reason for intellectuals to recover its currency.¹⁹ Mishra and Hodge admit that this interpretation is guided by Foucault’s reading of Kant’s famous response to the question: *Was ist Aufklärung?*²⁰ In a widely read essay of the same title in French translation, *Qu’est-ce que les lumières?*, Foucault contends that Kant conceives of Enlightenment in several paradoxical ways, but that these definitions culminate in a differential understanding of “‘today’” vis-à-vis “‘yesterday.’”²¹ For Kant, Foucault writes, Enlightenment marks “an exit, a way out, a way of considering the difference ‘today introduces with respect to yesterday.’”²² It is in the same contrasting spirit that Mishra and Hodge seek “to rethink the program of postcolonialism” in the twenty-first century.²³

To salvage postcolonialism from the dustbin of history, Mishra and Hodge reassess the semantic field in which the words “colonial” and “postcolonial” have drifted

for centuries. After having observed somewhat crudely on the basis of Google hits and Oxford English Dictionary citations that postcolonialism is already disappearing from common parlance, they refer to the works of Stuart Hall, Simon Gikandi, and Emily Apter to reconfirm that the “slippery” nature of postcolonialism implies an ambiguous survival of colonialism in the present.²⁴ It marks, as they explain, a stubborn continuity of imperialist ideologies and colonialist practices in the era of globalization. They also clarify for the reader that postcolonialism stands for “a configuration of experiences and insights, hopes and dreams arising from a hitherto silenced part of the world,” and that it even contains elements from “the premodern world.”²⁵ Postcolonialism is attuned to “an intrinsic connection between living in a place, working the land, and honoring its gods, the spirits of the land,” a connection that secular Enlightenment narratives have tried to efface since the age of empires.²⁶

Colonialism and postcolonialism are words whose etymological origin lies in the Latin verb *colere*, “to cultivate” or “to dwell,” but as Mishra and Hodge point out, the meanings have departed from these roots to the extent that colonialism serves as a legitimization of conquest, invasion, and occupation, whereas postcolonialism signals an emancipatory intervention in this *mission civilisatrice*. According to Mishra and Hodge, this semantic drag is tantamount to “an amnesiac shift in the stock of words of modern European languages.”²⁷ It is “less rich, less adequate to the complexities of the present as well as the past” because it fails to codify and represent “surprising connections and contradictions that are still current.”²⁸ Consequently, what Mishra and Hodge find missing from contemporary postcolonial discourse are the deep histories of European colonization and non-European anticolonialism, as well as precolonial traditions that remain vital points of orientation for subjects in the former colonies. Symptomatic of poststructuralist critiques of colonialism, these gaps or oversights leave big holes in our knowledge of “a hitherto silenced part of the world.”²⁹

To elaborate on this observation, Mishra and Hodge examine five acclaimed works in postcolonial scholarship: Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*, Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe*, Neil Lazarus’s *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, and Gauri Viswanathan’s *Outside the Fold*.³⁰ The authors contend that these books represent “the contemporary postcolonial archive.”³¹ These publications are “sufficiently diverse to do some justice to the diversity of the field” and they are “sufficiently important to use as signs of their times,” which are also “our times.”³²

The first sign that Mishra and Hodge identify is mostly negative and they locate it in Bhabha’s oft-cited book. They observe that for Bhabha “anticolonial nationalist practice repeats, with a difference, an original metropolitan nationalism,” and that this “uncanny” repetition, which produces “a condition of ambivalent hybridity,” obfuscates colonial discourse.³³ According to Mishra and Hodge, Bhabha is also guilty of a slippery, if not sloppy, linguistic equation between the postcolonial and the postmodern, as he confuses the difference between historical fact and literary representation. Last but not least, he fetishizes “colonial elites who function around the edges of the colonial frame of domination and whose current avatars are the people of the diaspora, exiles and migrants who are at once here and elsewhere and whose presence disrupts received definitions of the nation.”³⁴

In other words, Bhabha blurs important conceptual boundaries between globe-trotting intellectuals and Third World subjects, and this confusion explains why his understanding of metropolitan nationalism in the colony links up with the Lacanian concept of mimicry in postcolonial transnationalism. As Mishra and Hodge note, this interpretation is complicit in the hegemonic vision of modernity. On the surface, it appears to subvert static definitions of self and other across the color-line, but upon closer examination it turns out to be typical of bourgeois capitalist colonialism in the metropolis.³⁵

Mishra and Hodge assert that there are two main problems with Bhabha's discursive analysis. One of them has to do with his celebration of the postcolonial migrant or exile as "a powerful subject of (post)modernity."³⁶ They argue that this generalization is nothing other than "a particular specialist discourse," which has little traction with social reality.³⁷ It only serves a small group of privileged academics who work comfortably and safely with texts at elite Western institutions. It has nothing to do with the daily struggle of individuals and communities in the Global South or in segregated parts of the West. The second problem that Mishra and Hodge see in Bhabha's theorization of hybridity, mimicry, and translation is the quiet dismissal of "life-worlds," which are equally subject to "imperialist domination and exclusion."³⁸ From their point of view, Bhabha is unable to "address the uneven and discrepant histories of colonial struggle in many parts of the world" or even recognize the relationship between "bourgeois anticolonial nationalism" and metropolitan cosmopolitanism because he reduces the postcolonial to an anxious, psychologically split postmodern subject.³⁹ For the same reason, he misses "Fanon's understanding of decolonization as a process that heralds a new nation state, in which the past may be redeemed through a new scansion of literary history seen in the tales of the postcolonial storytellers (inheritors of the age-old oral tradition)."⁴⁰ Disjointed from local history, Bhabha's textual analysis hovers high above "the materiality of historical memory," forcefully subtracting the "*national* project" from anticolonialism in poststructuralist terms.⁴¹

If *The Location of Culture* exhibits a deeply problematic blurring of boundaries between the postcolonial and the postmodern, Mishra and Hodge argue that the other four scholars reset the course of postcolonial studies. For example, they understand Spivak to be a theorist who situates herself squarely in the legacy of the Enlightenment project and criticizes Kant, Hegel, and Marx for foreclosing the native informant, although this figure proves to be "necessary for the construction of the European norm."⁴² In her magisterial study, they write, she pits "the bourgeois male subject of instrumental reason" against a subaltern woman subject who has systematically been excised from European anthropology and Western philosophy.⁴³ Mishra and Hodge conclude that Spivak's disruptive or interruptive reading of Enlightenment philosophy is immensely productive because it reclaims the marginalized other who has been written out of the writing scene from Western intellectual thought. Nevertheless, she "remains internal to dominant discourses" and this location is not without its lacunae.⁴⁴

Mishra and Hodge spell out that Spivak's position is problematic not least because religious modes of interaction precede the colonial past and permeate the postcolonial world. Although post-Enlightenment Western cultures lean toward separating church and state, this divisibility does not negate the "worldly social and political

function” of religion around the globe.⁴⁵ At this point, the authors turn to Viswanathan’s *Outside the Fold*, a study that examines religious conversion at the limit of secular modernity. Viswanathan, they explain, shows why religious conversion qualifies for a carefully coordinated political activity whereby minorities are subsumed either under a dominant cultural paradigm or under a national imaginary. She illustrates convincingly that postcolonial subjects reclaim precolonial or indigenous identities through religious practices. The example that Mishra and Hodge highlight from her investigation is that of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar who converts to Buddhism as a double-edged worldly and spiritual intervention in secular ideology. This case study illustrates the role of conversion in translating premodern “moral laws” into postcolonial “political rights.”⁴⁶

For Mishra and Hodge, then, “the postcolonial project remains incomplete” because belief systems and historical experiences have to be recovered more fully for today’s consciousness.⁴⁷ Modernity after Enlightenment is in need of reformulation precisely because its history has to be retold from the perspective of those whose life-world is not an imprint or an incorporation of the Eurocentric idea of civilizational progress. This archaeological recovery in cultural criticism mounts a direct opposition to the convergence of postcolonialism and postmodernism.⁴⁸ It tells the history of “a contramodernity,” which they describe further as follows: “A modernity that does not cleanse itself of the world of demons, spirits, and gods, that seems not to accept the incommensurability of the rational and the mystical, requires us to think through historical processes hitherto silenced by (colonial) historicism.”⁴⁹ Rather than reinstate the dominant version of history as a teleological movement from barbarity to civilization and finally to *Kultur*, Mishra and Hodge refuse to denounce religion as a primitive, precolonial system. Under Viswanathan’s intellectual guidance, they conceive of the spiritual world as a strategic and empowering space for resisting colonial oppression as well as postcolonial suffering.⁵⁰

As much as Mishra and Hodge bring their critical spirit to bear on the importance of religious or occult studies for postcolonial revisions of modernity, Marxism, too, receives their utmost attention. They observe that Marxist theory has rarely been affirmed in postcolonial studies, but as they go on to say, “*unless postcolonialism can reestablish vital links with Marxism it will not survive nor deserve to survive long into the twenty-first century.*”⁵¹ Again in reference to Spivak’s deconstructive project, they concede that Marx’s celebration of the native informant as a revolutionary ends up “reconfirming the older imperial narrative of otherness detected in Kant and Hegel” because this logic leaves open the possibility of exploiting non-Europeans in communist struggles against capitalist structures of exploitation.⁵² Nevertheless, Mishra and Hodge insist upon the urgency of rejuvenating postcolonialism with a Marxist spirit because otherwise there cannot be “a systematic theory,” which grapples with colonialism as a form of historical capitalism with strategic territorial expansions and calculated economic treatises.⁵³ As it turns out, this argument is primarily based on Lazarus’s work.

Mishra and Hodge contend that Lazarus’s *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* shows how contemporary postcolonial theory fails to confront colonial history head-on when it ignores or simplifies “nationalist discourses of resistance.”⁵⁴ The solution to this problem lies in outlining an alternative materialist history of modernity, which is to say, in revisiting the precolonial past and

reformulating postcolonial theory from a rigorous Marxist perspective. Mishra and Hodge state that, although Lazarus receives credit for facilitating a mutually enriching dialogue between postcolonial scholars and Marxist theorists, this conversation “needs to be even more subtle and systematic than it is in the hands of Lazarus,” the reason being that Marxism is deeply suspicious of “those life-worlds of spirits, myths, religions, indeed of poetry.”⁵⁵ What this subtle systematicity looks like is the subject of their final close reading, although its exact nature remains couched in another close reading of Chakrabarty’s argument.

To describe “a radical rewrite of the project of (Enlightenment) modernity,” Mishra and Hodge point to the last example of their contemporary postcolonial archive: *Provincializing Europe*.⁵⁶ Here, they explain, Chakrabarty manages “to blast asunder the grounds of a (received) historicism” while teasing out “new, generally subaltern, postcolonial historicities.”⁵⁷ Although the dominant narrative of modernity follows the logic of capital as “a totalizing category,” Chakrabarty demonstrates how “life-world knowledges,” which are “nontotalizing,” implode economist unity.⁵⁸ Since religious beliefs and social relations exceed highly scripted variations, variations that Marx associates with capitalist work-forms, scholars have the opportunity to follow Chakrabarty’s theoretical model and document the history of contramodernity in a combination of Marxist critique and religious study.

According to Mishra and Hodge, postcolonial studies originates in “diverse struggles that make up subaltern histories, themselves a collective challenge to the homogeneity of the dominant narrative.”⁵⁹ However, they argue that the time is now to remember Foucault’s definition of Enlightenment after Kant and to historicize the postcolonial anew. As their close textual analysis suggests, this work of remembrance – this *Aufklärung* – entails a self-critical reformulation of modernity in terms that come to us from a few diasporic theorists of mostly Indian descent. It injects Marxist critiques of capital accumulation and abstract labor into contemporary dominant trends in postcolonial criticism. It also differentiates present from past by deconstructing false religious–secular binaries. These nuanced movements in postcolonial studies help delineate in what sense the modern world is postcolonial and to what extent postmodernism clashes with postcolonialism. They shed light on the importance of studying religious imaginings (see Timothy Fitzgerald, Milinda Banerjee, and Meryem Zaman) or neoliberal racial and development ideologies (see Kenneth Harrow, Filippo Menozzi, David Bering-Porter, Kate Manzo/Rory Padfield) as dehumanizing, totalizing forces in postmodernity.

NETWORKING POSTCOLONIALISM

I have summarized the main arguments of this essay not only to remind readers of the common divide among poststructuralists and Marxists in postcolonial studies, but also to take issue with Mishra and Hodge’s polemical position in relation to the field. Apart from leaving out fascinating developments in postcolonial intersections with digital humanities (see Roopika Risam, Angel David Nieves/Siobhan Senior, and Adeline Koh), environmental humanities (see Eóin Flannery, Cajetan N. Iheka, Serpil Oppermann, and Kirk B. Sides), human rights studies (see Ali Behdad, Jessica Whyte, and Claire Edington), memory cultures (see Ananya Jahanara Kabir, Stef Craps, Rituparna Mitra, and Amel A. Mahmoud), urban humanities, and postcommunist

communities, Mishra and Hodge rehearse an all-too-familiar, entrenched dispute among leftist thinkers. Their analysis is instructive insofar as it offers a coherent navigation through five highly influential books in postcolonial studies, but they contest the dominant discursive paradigm (poststructuralism) in favor of another injunction (Marxism) only to locate the origin of contemporary postcolonial studies in a handful of scholarly works. I hesitate to think of those scholarships as representative of postcolonial studies because they are, more broadly speaking, extraordinary or exceptional contributions to the humanities at large. It seems to me that the future of postcolonial studies is in need of a more diversified and transnational genealogy of postcolonialism. What concerns me is a blatant lack of sensitivity to the tension between center and periphery in postcolonialism and between global English and every other language in cosmopolitics (see Garth Myers, Olivia C. Harrison, Carmela Garritano, and Jonathan Zwicker). I do not mean to be mean here, but the ground that Mishra and Hodge cover in close reading is far too small to represent the postcolonial world in its planetarity. In pursuit of a more democratic postcolonial world to come, intellectuals have to place their work more deliberately in relation to the rest of a polyphonic field.

In one of the endnotes, Mishra and Hodge confess that their analysis falls short of offering “a comprehensive explanatory model.”⁶⁰ Indeed, they hardly say anything about Francophone, Lusophone, Caribbean, or East Asian studies, although these interdisciplinary fields have greatly enriched postcolonial studies in the recent past. Think of Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih’s co-edited volume *Creolization of Theory* or Pheng Cheah’s *Inhuman Conditions*.⁶¹ From alternative cross-cultural, aesthetic, historical, and geopolitical perspectives, these publications intervene in universalist discourses on globalization while challenging sweeping conceptions of postcolonialism. They recognize the ongoing force of nation as a multidimensional category while subverting Eurocentric norms of identity or community (see Sadaf Ahmad, Abdulhamit Arvas, Jan Christian Bernabe, and Danny Méndez). To be sure, a comprehensive overview of postcolonialism is neither possible nor productive even in an expansive multi-authored volume as this one, but what Mishra and Hodge claim about the diversity of their conspicuous archive has to be put to the test.

Let me be even more precise in my criticism. One of the weaknesses I see in their argument is the glaring omission of cultures where the English language or British colonialism does not figure principally in postcolonial thinking. This elision, which Mishra and Hodge brush off as something “regrettable” in their aforementioned endnote, would not be consequential if cultural practice were not tied to linguistic operation, but as their own theoretical emphasis on historical specificity suggests, multilingualism and postcolonialism have to be rigorously linked together.⁶² What happens in English-speaking postcolonial territories requires translation – that is, translation in the double sense of translocation and transformation – into other colonial and postcolonial experiences. Another problem has to do with the authorization of theorists of mostly Indian descent who work at U.S. and British universities. Bhabha currently teaches at Harvard University, while Spivak and Viswanathan have been working at Columbia University for some time. Chakrabarty is affiliated with the University of Chicago, whereas Lazarus, after having taught at Brown University, calls the University of Warwick his intellectual home. These institutional affiliations in conjunction with several national filiations make up unique intellectual

and geopolitical coordinates according to which scholars intervene in postcolonial studies. It is paramount not to lift up these positions to universally valid vantage points. Unless Mishra and Hodge are interested in passing judgment on what counts as postcolonial studies and what does not, the absence of writers such as Édouard Glissant, Selma Dabbagh, Yewande Omotoso, and Gerald Vizenor and that of scholars from neighboring disciplines presents a troublingly metonymic picture of the postcolonial world. What they survey does not suffice to trace the global history of imperialism, nor does it track properly the travel of postcolonial theory. Without a more transnational consideration of what postcolonial intellectuals do around the globe, readers are bound to think that only a very small network of thinkers have shaped postcolonial studies from primarily English-speaking perspectives. Without more textual examples in hand, readers are led to conjecture that the most productive analyses of postcolonialism in the twenty-first century are more or less derivable from those closely or widely read scholarships. This, I believe, is a misrepresentation of the postcolonial world. It lacks the planetary framing of a field that has undergone rapid diversification across disciplinary, linguistic, and national boundaries. The origin of postcolonialism is not easily linked to their archive.

In order to provide readers with a more expansive and reconstructive picture of postcolonial theory, I have analyzed the same archive with metadata about publication records specifically in reference to it. The aim is not to strive for some comprehensive visualization of postcolonial scholars in community, but to see the currency with which each scholarship travels across disciplinary boundaries. Created with an open-source network visualization and manipulation tool, the following graphs show which of the 16,007 journal articles, book reviews, transcribed conversations, and public discussions catalogued in JSTOR with the keywords “colonial,” “colonialism,” “postcolonial,” and “postcolonialism” cite those five texts. The representations are based on 12,359 authors who have published on these topics since 1975.⁶³

Figure C.1 shows that 674 authors make 801 references to at least one of the five works. In other words, most scholars who publish in colonial and postcolonial studies do not mention any of the five works. The countless nodes around the network represent these scholars. As the visualization suggests, then, it is important not to overrate the significance of prominent theorists for current postcolonial scholarship. It is also essential to keep in mind that Lazarus published his work in 1993, and that the last of the five books – Spivak’s *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* – appeared in 1999. Many of the publications represented in the periphery precede these books. What the graph makes clear as well is the opposite of what Mishra and Hodge wish to see. Scholars who write on colonialism or postcolonialism refer to Bhabha, Chakrabarty, Spivak, Viswanathan, and Lazarus in this order. There are far more scholarly references to *The Location of Culture* than there are to any of the other texts. The size of Bhabha’s scholarly network attests to the dominance of poststructuralist approaches to colonial, anticolonial, and postcolonial investigations of modernity, although this is not to say that Mishra and Hodge are necessarily wrong in their critique of his work. Figure C.1 omits the free-floating, unconnected nodes on the outskirts of this scholarly conversation in an effort to highlight the bibliographic network around each author.

Figure C.3 illustrates the same network in greater detail. In addition to identifying the authors whose publications refer to at least three of the five books under

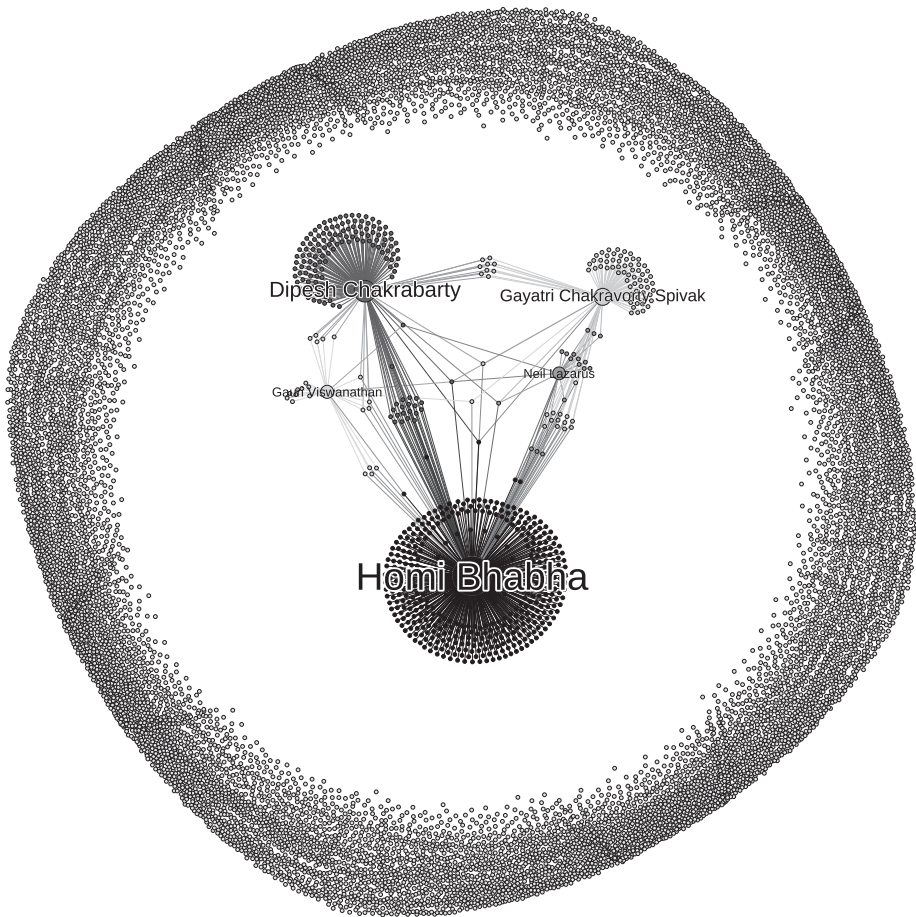


Figure C.1 JSTOR network structure of bibliographic references centered around five prominent publications, 1975–2014 (with authorial names). To see the high resolution version of this image, please visit *The Postcolonial World's* eResource at www.routledge.com/9781138778078 or David D. Kim's blog at www.ddkim323.wordpress.com.

consideration, the graph displays what kind of intellectual affinity there exists between texts via communities of scholars. Here, it is important to understand that each reference does not necessarily mean a positive relationship. Scholars cite or quote each other for various reasons, and this network, too, suggests a remarkably complex community of scholars, although the diagram flattens relations, be they positive or negative. For example, Mishra and Hodge are linked to Bhabha not because they agree on theoretical orientations, but because the co-authors probe Bhabha's allegedly ahistorical theorization of anticolonial mimicry or metropolitan cosmopolitanism. Therefore, Bhabha's large network is attributable not only to the insightful impact he has had on other scholars in the humanities and the social sciences, but also to the criticism that *The Location of Culture* has generated since 1991. The same discursive complexity applies to other networks as well.

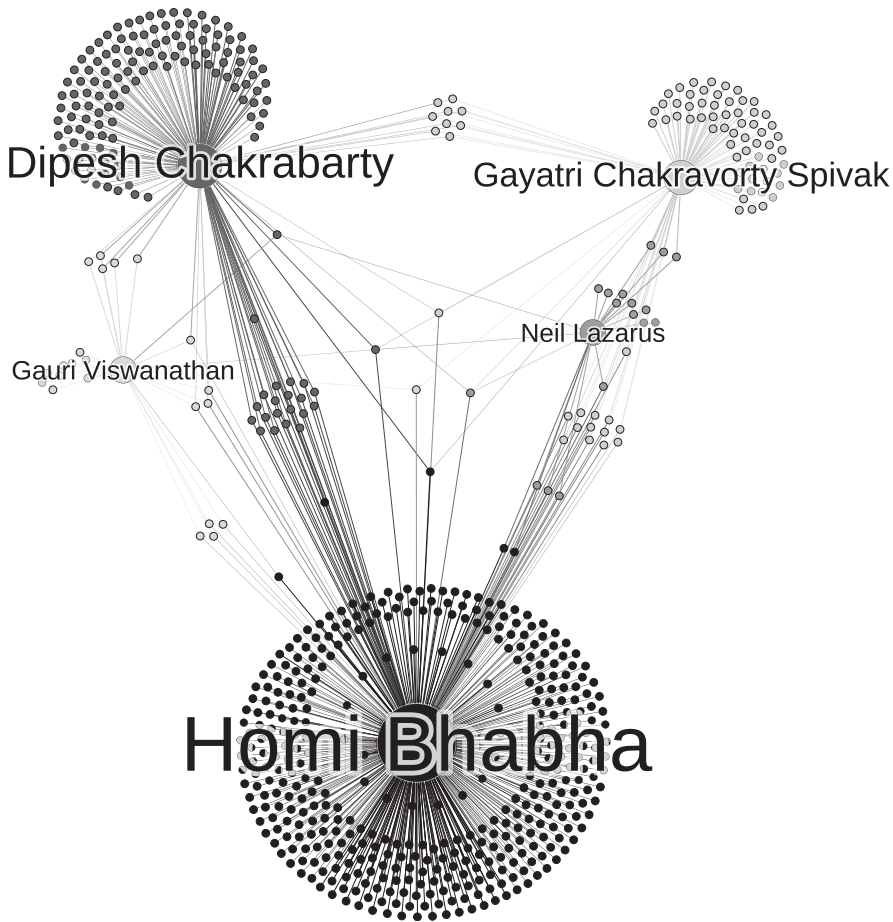


Figure C.2 A close-up of the JSTOR network structure of bibliographic references centered around five prominent publications (with authorial names).

To see the high resolution version of this image, please visit *The Postcolonial World's* eResource at www.routledge.com/9781138778078 or David D. Kim's blog at www.ddkim323.wordpress.com.

Of particular interest are the “brokers” who engage with at least three of the five books. In addition to Mishra and Hodge, they include Sareeta Amrute (Anthropology at the University of Washington), Srinivas Aravamudan (English at Duke University), Saurabh Dube (History at El Colegio de México), Webb Keane (Anthropology at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor), Revathi Krishnaswamy (English and Comparative Literature at San José State University), Neil Lazarus, Saloni Mathur (Art History at the University of California Los Angeles), Joan Ramon Resina (Iberian and Latin American Studies at Stanford University), and Malini Johar Schueller (English at the University of Florida).⁶⁴ It is beyond the scope of this essay to explore further how these scholars primarily based at American universities serve as nodal points for other thinkers around the globe, but one of my theses is that picturing the postcolonial world in the twenty-first century ought to

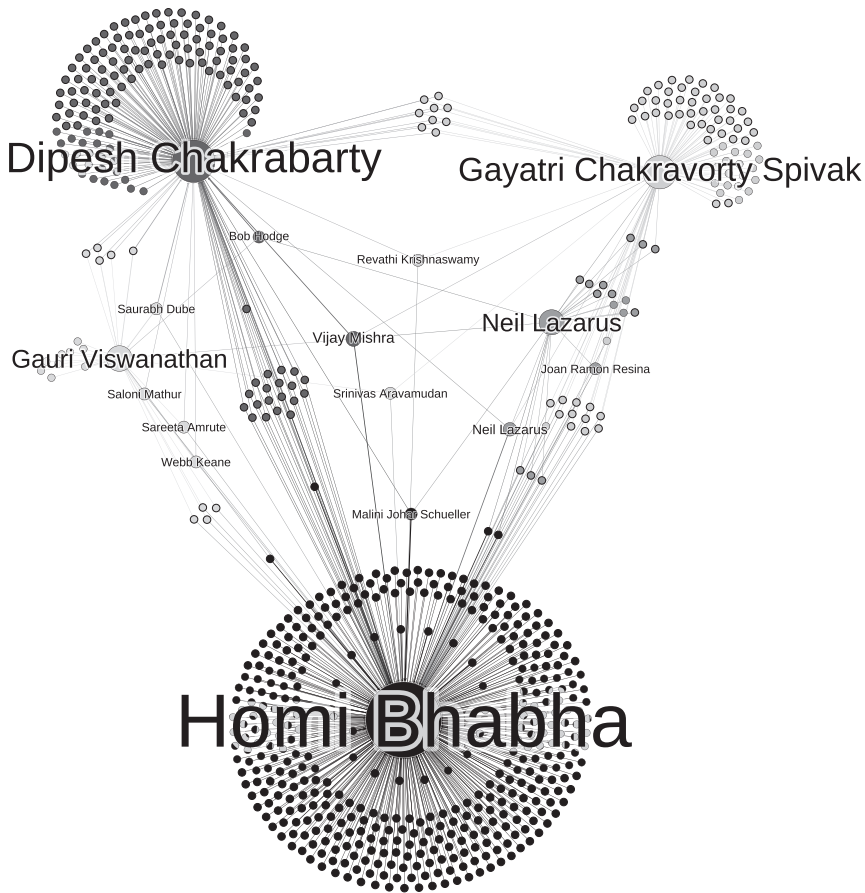


Figure C.3 A close-up of the JSTOR network structure of bibliographic references centered around five prominent publications and focusing on the “brokers” who cite at least three of them.

To see the high resolution version of this image, please visit *The Postcolonial World's* eResource at www.routledge.com/9781138778078 or David D. Kim's blog at www.ddkim323.wordpress.com.

track the transformation of their ideas and methodologies across time and space. This tracking captures the vitality of intellectual discussions about the colonial past and the postcolonial present without ignoring the contexts within which these debates happen. This distant reading goes hand-in-hand with the type of close reading through which the postcolonial world is commonly mapped from a particular disciplinary, theoretical, or geopolitical perspective. Religious and Marxist studies are important for such endeavors, but the point I wish to make is that in order to generate a colorful and critical picture of the world through the postcolonial lens one has to see the stunning range of criticisms that make up postcolonial studies. It includes, just to name a few examples from the visualized data, alternative narratives of modernity in Ethiopia and Japan, conceptions of global history and postcolonial indigeneity, Portuguese poetry and Tibetan dance, African music

and world literature. Mishra and Hodge fail to consider this ideational movement in postcolonial studies. Their genealogy is mostly limited to the English-speaking world.

Where scholars work, in what journals they publish, and in what languages they write – these are important issues to consider for planetary accounts of postcolonialism. To this end, Figure C.4 offers a network visualization of *The Postcolonial World*. The outer circle shows contributors to this volume. The inner circle consists of thinkers whom the contributors cite at least three times. It includes Bhabha, Chakrabarty, and Spivak, but the list does not stop there. Among others, Judith Butler, Partha Chatterjee, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Simon Gikandi, Achille Mbembe, Samuel Moyn, and Edward Said are present as well. The smaller names in the middle of this diagram represent authors whom the contributors cite once or twice.⁶⁵

I read this visualization as an illustration of the remarkable movement of ideas and methodologies across cultural, disciplinary, national, linguistic, and historical boundaries. Mishra and Hodge do not seem to think much of this type of communication, but it is constitutive of postcolonialism in the twenty-first century. Unlike the postcolonial world that they generate in close reading, the transnational scholarly community that I have assembled in distant reading does without a few centers to which all the other scholarships are implicitly or explicitly connected. Depending on the perspective, relational coordinates change, whereas the multiplicity of a constantly transforming postcolonial world remains. If there is a way to undermine convenient attempts to dismiss colonial aftermaths today, this network visualization might function as an eye-opening point of departure for revaluing the currency of postcolonialism in a globalizing modernity.

This network analysis also raises critical questions about divisions and linkages between geopolitical, thematic, and methodological organizations in postcolonial studies. How is it that the work of Nobel Prize laureate Amartya Sen promises a productive dialogue between Claire Edington, whose work examines drug detention centers in Vietnam against the historical backdrop of French colonial rule in Indochina and the socialist state after the war, and Ananya Kabir, who explores the concept of postcolonial happiness following collective trauma through a self-critical encounter with the Brazilian carnival? At what point does Ato Quayson function as a critical interlocutor between Abdulhamit Arvas's inquiry into queer identity in Turkey and Garth Myers's focus on cultural geography in Zanzibar? Or why does Eóin Flannery's fascinating examination of the uneven historical incorporation of Ireland in industrial modernity through a coercive imperial modernization make up its own postcolonial microcosm? And what about Amel A. Mahmoud's essay in which the horrendous experience of Jewish exiles and deportees from the Middle East is explored with great adroitness? Why is it that Irish and Jewish postcolonial experiences seem to be outliers in current postcolonial studies?

Many more questions could be asked about the visible linkages and the lack thereof. In addition to revealing long-standing or emerging affiliations between cultures, disciplines, histories, and institutions, they might point to critical alliances yet to be established between postcolonial subfields. If postcolonialism is truly transnational in its scope because of the global history of imperialism, it seems to me that intellectuals must interrogate this kind of messy movement of ideas and methodologies across

— Conclusion —

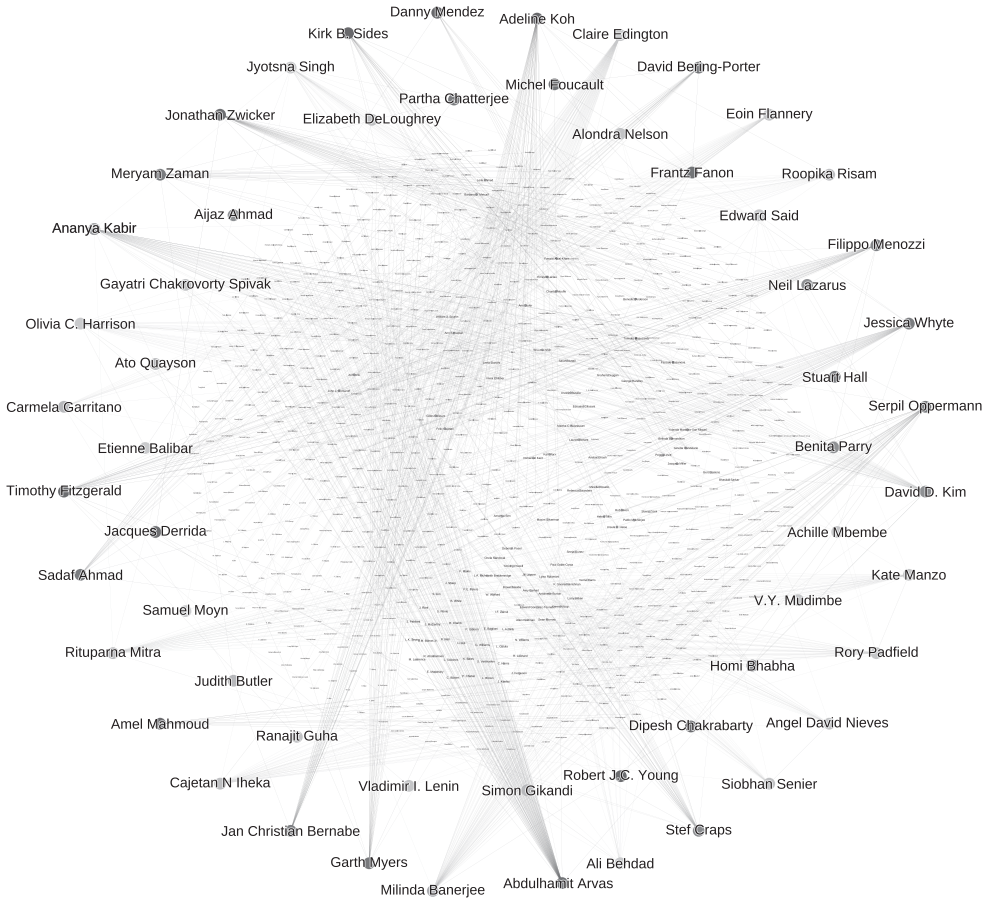


Figure C.4 Network structure of bibliographic references in *The Postcolonial World*.

To see the high resolution version of this image, please visit The Postcolonial World's eResource at www.routledge.com/9781138778078 or David D. Kim's blog at www.ddkim323.wordpress.com.

disciplinary boundaries. This conceptual mobility is crucial for doing postcolonial theory in the twenty-first century.

POSTCOLONIAL TRAVEL

As a system of thought, theory is supposed to be coherent and historically situated. In postcolonial studies, though, the multiplicity of European and non-European imperialisms, as well as the complexity of disjunctive or uneven postcolonialisms, have unsettled what counts as a theoretical core. If one also keeps in mind the many postcolonial thinkers who have left their country of origin to pursue professional opportunities abroad, the proliferation of postcolonial studies in higher education, along with the transformation of methodological, geopolitical, and thematic approaches to this intellectual responsibility, cannot surprise us. Said discusses this

important point in an essay titled “Traveling Theory.” His subject of investigation is not postcolonialism per se, but he explains in evocative terms that when “one theory travels from one situation to another,” it inevitably undergoes translation in the sense of departure from its original.⁶⁶ It is “to betray some fundamental uncertainty about specifying or delimiting the field to which any one theory or idea might belong.”⁶⁷ If theory is not to function as “an ideological trap,” Said argues that it has to remain open to revision in accordance with the distance traveled or destination reached, and in recognition of the one who sets this translation in motion.⁶⁸

Mishra and Hodge are right to say that postcolonialism constitutes “an urgent, unfinished project” whose theoretical platform serves “to understand other scenes, in other times, in other paradigms.”⁶⁹ However, their contemporary postcolonial archive is far too limited to engender this mobile and transformational understanding. The task requires a more diverse and open community of public intellectuals who contribute to assembling the postcolonial world from multiple points of view. This border-crossing and radically democratic communication is what promises to renew postcolonialism in each generation.

The Postcolonial World refrains from authorizing an already familiar selection of postcolonial theories, signaling a tentative passage from one consciousness to another after the first wave of postcolonialisms. For me, this mobility is pivotal. I am deeply affiliated with German intellectual thought, even as postcolonial studies affords me a critical framework for thinking through this affiliation and what binds me otherwise in filiation.⁷⁰ As scholars of German face the exciting challenge of reinventing their scholarly and civic contribution to higher education, and as current economic, legal, and political decisions in Berlin threaten to render fellow Europeans, not to mention citizens of neighboring countries, into permanently indebted members of the world community, I sense more than ever the need to revitalize my discipline with postcolonial thought and to engender a space in which those whose life-worlds intersect or overlap with German-speaking cultures are included. This cosmopolitan consciousness seems to be impossible without reflecting on who is able to partake in the discussion or who remains missing from making the world a communal *Ding*. It lies at the heart of assembling the postcolonial world not as a given, but as an inheritance to be reclaimed in transmission. What guarantees the future of postcolonialism is a planetary and public spirit, and my hope is that *The Postcolonial World* makes a small contribution to this assemblage.⁷¹

ENDNOTES

1. David D. Kim, “The Visual Regime of the Globe: Revaluing Invisibility in Global Modernity.” *TRANSIT* 7.1 (2011): 1–25; David D. Kim, “Reading *Genji* in German: Reflections on World Literature and Asian-German Studies.” In *Imagining Germany Imagining Asia: Essays in Asian-German Studies*, ed. Veronika Fuechtner and Mary Rhiel (Rochester: Camden House, 2013), 220–241.
2. Heidegger makes this point in his 1935–1936 lecture series at the University of Freiburg. Martin Heidegger, *What Is a Thing?*, trans. W.B. Barton, Jr. and Vera Deutsch (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1967), 8. In a short essay titled “Bauen Wohnen Denken” (*Building Dwelling Thinking*), he also defines the thing as a “place” (*Ort*), which opens

- up the “space” (*Raum*) of “gathering” (*eine Stätte verstatten*). Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, vol. 18 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 155.
3. Stuart Hall, “When Was ‘the Post-Colonial’? Thinking at the Limit.” In *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London: Routledge, 1996), 242–260; Anne McClintock, “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Postcolonialism.’” *Social Text* 31–32 (1992): 84–98; Ella Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial.’” *Social Text* 31–32 (1992): 100–113.
 4. I borrow the term “distant reading” from Franco Moretti who has argued that the basic idea behind this sociologically inspired mode of inquiry is to transform “*the temporal flow of a dramatic plot* [. . .] *into a set of two-dimensional signs*” and to see the clustering of characters “at a single glance.” Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (New York: Verso, 2013), 211. This type of reading considers distance “not an obstacle, but a *specific form of knowledge*: fewer elements, hence a sharper sense of their overall interconnection.” Although Moretti admits that it “*(mis-)us[es] network theory to bring some order into literary evidence*,” he argues that it clarifies what literary scholars say in conventional terms. For example, his Hamlet model illustrates in a two-dimensional diagram who communicates with whom. By manipulating this social network visually, Moretti explains why Horatio’s previously neglected role in Shakespeare’s drama deserves a more careful look. I apply the term “distant reading” to visualize the postcolonial community whose members read each other’s work and discuss common or divergent matters of concern. Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (New York: Verso, 2005), 1, 212.
 5. Martin Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes.” In *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), 75–90.
 6. Bill Ashcroft, “Towards a Postcolonial Aesthetics.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 51.3 (April 2015): 7.
 7. *Ibid.*, 5.
 8. Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” *Critical Inquiry* 17.2 (Winter 1991): 348.
 9. *Ibid.*, 357.
 10. Aijaz Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory.’” *Social Text* 17 (Autumn 1987): 9.
 11. David Chioni Moore makes this observation in a comparative study of postcolonialism and postcommunism. He writes: “It is no doubt true that there is, on this planet, not a single square meter of inhabited land that has not been, at one time or another, colonized and then postcolonial. Across Eurasia, Africa, the Americas, and more, peoples have formed and re-formed, conquered and been conquered, moved and dissolved. And virtually all groups on this earth, whatever their claims to migrant, exile, conquering, returned, or indigenous status, have come, at some remove or other, from somewhere else. The result of all this movement, much of which has been arguably criminal, is that many cultural situations, past and present, can be said to bear the postcolonial stamp, often in ways only partly corresponding to current notions.” David Chioni Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique.” *PMLA* 116.1 (January 2001): 112.
 12. Simon J. Potter and Jonathan Saha, “Global History, Imperial History and Connected Histories of Empire.” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 16.1 (Spring 2015). http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v016/16.1.potter.html. The same connective approach to Enlightenment history is also apparent in Sebastian Conrad, “Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique.” *American Historical Review* 117.4 (October 2012): 999–1027.

13. Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1. Also see Phillip Darby, "Doing the Postcolonial Differently." In *Postcolonialism and Political Theory*, ed. Palini Persram (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 254.
14. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).
15. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 303.
16. Simon Gikandi, "Poststructuralism and Postcolonial Discourse." In *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. Neil Lazarus (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 98. Simon Gikandi explicates this tension revolving around postcolonial theory by identifying Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik, on the one hand, and by referring to Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, on the other. There are two others who similarly call for a return to Marxism in postcolonial studies. In *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, Neil Lazarus argues that he wants to revisit postcolonial studies for two reasons: first, to criticize problematic concepts; and second, to reconstruct productive methodologies. In *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), Timothy Brennan likewise criticizes theory, including its postcolonial variation, as a leftist academic discourse, which has mostly lost touch with social democratic organization.
17. Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, "What Was Postcolonialism?" *New Literary History* 36 (2005): 375.
18. *Ibid.*, 376.
19. *Ibid.*, 380.
20. Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" In *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32–50; Immanuel Kant, "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?" *Berlinische Monatsschrift*. Dezember-Heft (1784): 481–494.
21. Mishra and Hodge, "What Was Postcolonialism?," 376. Kant does not define Enlightenment in these terms, but Foucault refers to Kant's use of the German word *Ausgang* – that is, exit – to make a qualitative differentiation between past and present before describing Enlightenment as "an attitude of modernity."
22. Mishra and Hodge, "What Was Postcolonialism?," 376. For a close reading of this interpretation, I refer the reader to another essay of mine: David Kim, "The Cosmopolitics of *Parrhesia*: Foucault and Truth-Telling as Human Right." In *Imagining Human Rights*, ed. Susanne Kaul and David Kim (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 83–99.
23. Mishra and Hodge, "What Was Postcolonialism?," 399.
24. *Ibid.*, 377. The references are as follows: Emily Apter, *Continental Drift: From National Characters to Virtual Subjects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Julie Drew, "Cultural Composition: Stuart Hall on Ethnicity and the Discursive Turn." *Journal of Advanced Composition* 18.2 (1998): 171–196; Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
25. *Ibid.*, 378.
26. *Ibid.*, 378.
27. *Ibid.*, 379.
28. *Ibid.*, 379.
29. *Ibid.*, 378.
30. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Political Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).
31. Mishra and Hodge, "What Was Postcolonialism?," 382.

32. Ibid., 382.
33. Ibid., 383.
34. Ibid., 383.
35. This problem is apparent in Daniel Coleman's study of the deep fissure between indigeneity and diaspora as two related, yet continuously divided modes of displacement. For more information, see Daniel Coleman, "Indigenous Place and Diaspora Space: Of Literalism and Abstraction." *Settler Colonial Studies* 6.6 (February 2015): 1–16. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/2201473X.2014.1000913>
36. Mishra and Hodge, "What Was Postcolonialism?," 384.
37. Ibid., 384.
38. Ibid., 384.
39. Ibid., 385, 384.
40. Ibid., 385.
41. Ibid., 384.
42. Ibid., 386.
43. Ibid., 385.
44. Ibid., 387.
45. Ibid., 392.
46. Ibid., 394.
47. Ibid., 394.
48. According to Benita Parry, "postcolonialism has come to be identified as postmodernist in its orientation." Benita Parry, "The Institutionalization of Postcolonial Studies." In *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. Neil Lazarus (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 66.
49. Mishra and Hodge, "What Was Postcolonialism?," 396, 395.
50. On this note, it would have been helpful if Mishra and Hodge had taken a closer look at the concluding chapter in Said's *The World, the Text, and the Critic* where the author also clarifies the falsehood of a "secure protection" that "systems of belief" promise as "systems of authority," an argument that resonates well with Viswanathan's critical inquiry into religious conversation. Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 292, 290. For an examination of the intellectual affiliation between Said and Viswanathan, see Gauri Viswanathan, ed., *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002).
51. Mishra and Hodge, "What Was Postcolonialism?," 388.
52. Ibid., 388.
53. Ibid., 389.
54. Ibid., 391.
55. Ibid., 391.
56. Ibid., 395.
57. Ibid., 395.
58. Ibid., 396.
59. Ibid., 398.
60. Ibid., 400.
61. Pheng Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds., *Creolization of Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
62. Mishra and Hodge, "What Was Postcolonialism?," 400.
63. To use the technical terms in social network analysis, the authors are "nodes" that stand for their publication and each "node" is linked to another "node" by a directed "edge," which represents citation, quotation, or reference. The edges are "weighted" according to the number of citations, quotations, or references. I have tapped into the JSTOR Data

for Research (DfR) for two reasons. First, this database includes scholarly publications both in the humanities and in the social sciences, although most of them are written in the English language. I want to see how this limitation still multiplies the picture of what is considered postcolonial studies. Second, the JSTOR DfR provides scholars with a set of convenient tools for analyzing big data and I have benefited from its services to examine the metadata of more than seven million publications across disciplinary boundaries. Illustrative of this massive scope, my project involves a scholarly team and I want to thank a few individuals for their support. I thank Cameron Price and Michael Krot at JSTOR for processing my data request and having a conversation with me about the JSTOR database. I also thank Nicholas de Carlo, a PhD student in the Department of Germanic Languages at UCLA, for processing the JSTOR metadata and working with me on the network graphs (Figures C.1 through C.4). Viola Ardeni, a PhD student in the Department of Italian at UCLA, deserves credit for helping me compile the bibliographic data for Figure C.4.

64. A complete listing of their publications would be too lengthy here. Please search the JSTOR database at <http://www.jstor.org/>, or readers are welcome to contact me at dkim@humnet.ucla.edu to receive the full bibliography.
65. If readers are interested in seeing the network with all names, please visit my webpage at <https://ddkim323.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/chosen-graph.pdf>. It is not possible to display the names of all authors in print.
66. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 227.
67. *Ibid.*, 227.
68. *Ibid.*, 241.
69. Mishra and Hodge, “What Was Postcolonialism?,” 399.
70. What I mean by filiation and affiliation is borrowed from Said’s instructive assessment of Erich Auerbach as a critic in exile, someone whose secular criticism of texts as locally grounded, historically particular conceptions of the world becomes only possible away from home in the outskirts of continental Europe. Said is referring to Auerbach’s writing of *Mimesis* in Istanbul during World War II: “We have in Auerbach an instance both of *filiation* with his natal culture and, because of exile, *affiliation* with it through critical consciousness and scholarly work.” Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 16.
71. I thank David Bering-Porter, Roopika Risam, and Jyotsna Singh for their incisive comments on a previous draft of this chapter.

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